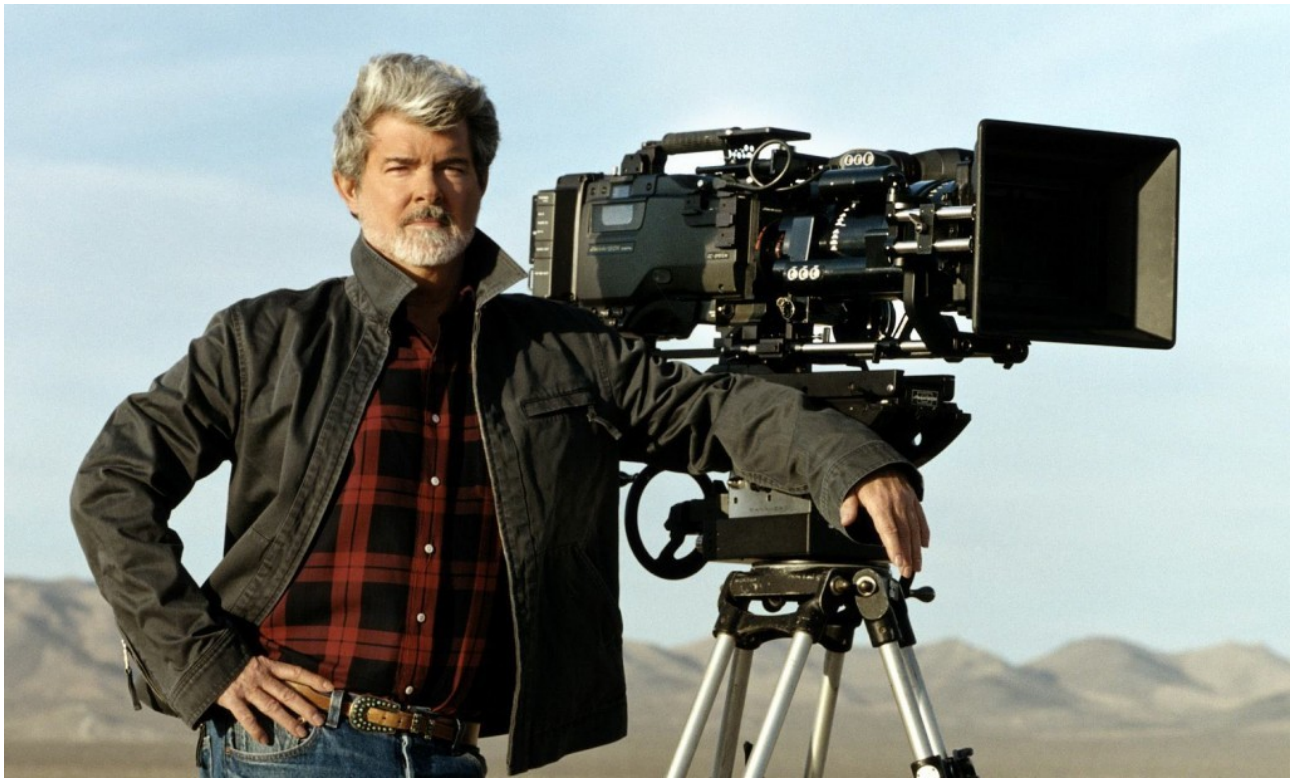
RING THEORY: The Hidden Artistry of the *Star Wars* Prequels.

October 31, 2014 by Mike Klimo | Star Wars

How George Lucas used an ancient technique called "ring composition" to reach a level of storytelling sophistication in his six-part saga that is unprecedented in cinema history.



The interesting thing about Star Wars—and I didn't ever really push this very far, because it's not really that important—but there's a lot going on there that most people haven't come to grips with yet. But when they do, they will find it's a much more intricately made clock than most people would imagine.

—George Lucas, Vanity Fair, February 2005

The famous yellow letters of the opening text crawl slowly recede into the vastness of space. The camera pans down to reveal a large planet and its two moons. Suddenly, a tiny Rebel ship flies overhead, pursued, a few moments later, by an Imperial Star Destroyer—an impossibly large ship

that nearly fills the frame as it goes on and on seemingly forever. The effect is visceral and exhilarating.

What's more, the single continuous shot (it lasts about 30 seconds) illustrates both the film's basic storyline, a small band of Rebels fight an evil galactic empire against overwhelming odds, and one of its central themes, the indomitable nature of the human spirit—all without uttering a single line of dialogue. It's a masterful example of visual storytelling.

This is, of course, the opening of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977), arguably one of the most famous opening shots in cinema history, and rightfully so.

Now compare this to the opening of *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* (1999): The signature opening title crawl slowly disappears into infinity, we pan down, a small spaceship travels quickly past the camera, and then … lands.

The man behind Red Letter Media's enormously popular video reviews of the prequel trilogy, Mike Stoklasa, probably summed up the feelings that many *Star Wars* fans had when they saw this for the first time, particularly those who'd waited 16 long years, since 1983's *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi*, for *Menace*: "From the very start of [*The Phantom Menace*] I could tell something was really wrong just by the way it started. It opens with some boring pilot asking for permission to land on a ship that looks like a half-eaten donut, with a donut hole in the middle." [1]

Admittedly, the seemingly bland and uninspired opening of *Menace* doesn't pack quite the same punch as *A New Hope*'s and instead leaves one feeling a little underwhelmed, to say the least. The problem, though, is that it may not be the fairest of comparisons. Because something really interesting happens when you compare *Menace's* opening to that of *Return of the Jedi*'s.

In *Menace*, a Republic space cruiser flies through space towards the planet Naboo, which is surrounded by Trade Federation Battleships. Cut to inside the ship's cockpit. The captain requests permission to board. On the viewscreen, an alien gives the okay. The space cruiser then flies towards a battleship and lands in a large docking bay.

In the opening of *Jedi*, an Imperial Shuttle exits the main bay of a Star Destroyer and flies towards the Death Star, which looms over the forest moon of Endor. Cut to inside the shuttle's cockpit. The captain requests deactivation of the security shield in order to land aboard the Death Star. Inside the Death Star control room, a controller gives the captain clearance to proceed. The shuttle then flies towards the Death Star and lands in a large docking bay.

Here's a side-by-side comparison of the two openings:

As you can see, there are some definite similarities between the two sequences. They both consist of a small ship landing on a spherical battle station that's orbiting a lush, green planet. And they both consist of a similar series of shots.

But, at the same time, there are some clear differences between the sequences. First off, in *Menace*, the Republic cruiser is a "good guys" ship. In *Jedi*, the Imperial Shuttle is a "bad guys" ship. Second, outside the cruiser's cockpit window we see the peaceful planet of Naboo whereas outside the shuttle's window we see the partially constructed skull-like Death Star. Third, the screen direction is reversed. The Republic cruiser moves across the frame from left to right, the Imperial

shuttle moves right to left. Even some of the camera angles are reversed in a way. The cruiser enters the docking bay in a low-angle shot, the shuttle in a high-angle shot. From this standpoint, then, the two sequences seem almost like mirror images of each other.

Now, the prequels are filled with frequent callbacks to the original films, to be sure, but this seems particularly odd. Assuming it was intentional, why would the opening of *Episode I* reflect the opening of *Episode VI* (and at such an incredible level of detail, no less)? It definitely doesn't feel like the usual, run-of-the-mill fanservice that's so common in movies nowadays. Nor does it feel like a traditional framing device, since the beginning of *Menace* reflects the beginning, rather than the end, of *Jedi*.

So, is there something going on here? Or is this just a really strange coincidence and I'm reading too much into things?

Unfortunately, Red Letter Media's *Menace* review doesn't mention anything about the likenesses between the two sequences. The closest thing we get to an explanation is probably Stoklasa's complaint that "Nothing in *The Phantom Menace* makes any sense at all. It comes off like a script written by an eight-year-old. It's like George Lucas finished the script in one draft, like he turned it in and they decided to go with it, without anyone saying that it made no sense at all, or it was a stupid incoherent mess." [2]

However, in Red Letter Media's review of *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (2005), Stoklasa does offer up two possible explanations for any and all of the similarities between the old films and the new films: "a lack of originality or a lack of vision." [3]

Over a montage showing many of the references to the original trilogy that can be found in the much-maligned prequel trilogy he says, "The new films just borrow and recycle from the original ideas, as if there's no way to create anything new."[4]

But is this really the case?

Anne Lancashire, professor of Cinema Studies and Drama at the University of Toronto (and whose seminal writings on *Star Wars* form the basis for much of this essay), offers a third, perhaps more thoughtful, possibility that might help shed some light on the matter.

In her 2000 essay, "*The Phantom Menace*: Repetition, Variation, Integration," she argues that with the prequels, George Lucas was creating something unique in popular film:

> Not a series of narratively independent sequels and prequels (the normal mode in movie sequelization), focused on film genre conventions and/or on specific actors/roles, nor an old-fashioned serial with (merely) narratively interlocking episodes, but an epic mythological saga—full of exotic locales and monsters, like the sagas of old—consisting of at least six mutually-dependent parts interrelated in an intricately designed narrative, mythological, and metaphoric whole. [5]

This means that Lucas was expanding the original trilogy into an "epic sextet, with patterns of plot and structure, cinematic allusions, and visual imagery acquiring meaning above all from [their] interrelationships." [6] So, according to Lancashire, each film should be read in terms of its part in the larger, unified whole.

Lucas himself alluded to this in an interview following the release of *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones* (2002): “Each episode has to stand on its own and have meaning on its own—except that it’s only one chapter in the book. It’s not the book. I can’t sacrifice one for the other, so I’m constantly balancing between the now and the larger picture. The now has to be engaging, but the larger picture is what’s really important.” [7]

Lancashire contends that Lucas began his “carefully designed interrelationships” between the six films by deliberately basing *Menace*’s narrative on *A New Hope*’s:

> Anakin Skywalker (eventual father of Luke) is [*Menace*’s] version of *A New Hope*’s Luke, going through narratively similar situations and experiences. Anakin, like Luke, is a young boy on the desert planet of Tatooine, from a “broken” family, who is suddenly given the opportunity to embark on an epic quest involving a beautiful, royal young woman in need of his help and a Jedi knight who becomes his mentor. Like Luke, Anakin accepts the opportunity and is flown through space with his mentor to face a test (for Luke, the Death Star rescue of Leia; for Anakin, a literal test before the Jedi Council). Like *A New Hope*, the film then ends with the boy’s special powers (including his capacity for friendship and love) permitting him to save his friends from annihilation by destroying an enemy battle station. Details of the narrative also correspond from one film to the other: the Jedi mentor’s advice to the protagonist to rely on his feelings, the death of the mentor in a light-saber duel, the association of allies with ancient sacred ruins. [8]

Also, as Lancashire points out, in repeating the narrative pattern of *A New Hope,* Lucas deliberately repeats that film's mythological pattern as well:

> Like the plot *of A New Hope,* that of [*Menace*] takes us through the three stages of [Joseph] Campbell's monomyth: the hero's departure (on his quest), initiation (testing experiences), and return (the emergence from tests to achieve a final victory). This is also both the plot pattern of each of [*Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)] and [*Jedi*] (with *Empire*'s "return" phase completed only at the start of *Jedi*) and, as well, the overarching pattern of the first-made trilogy as a whole (*A New Hope* as departure. [*Empire*] as initiation. [*Jedi*] as return). The integrating viewer can now perceive that *Star Wars* 1 through 6 will give us the same pattern arching over all six films, in relation to Anakin as hero: with his departure in [*Menace*], initiation in episodes 2 – 3, and return in 4 – 6 (beginning with his discovery of his son Luke in 4 – 5, and ending with his self-sacrificial death for Luke, and therefore resurrection, at the end of 6). [9]

Repeating the patterns of plot and myth, Lancashire argues, gives the saga, among other things, "a sense of repeating, increasingly complex cycles of human experience," within individual lives, from one generation to the next, and "within the overall movement of Anakin's entire life from boyhood to death." [10]

In addition: "[The repeated patterns] also allow, through variations, an emotionally and intellectually complicating emphasis upon difference and change. The broad pattern of human life, from youth to maturity to death, remains constant, but individual circumstances within the pattern inevitably differ, creating different possibilities and problems." [11]

It's also worth mentioning that the sense of repeating cycles is not only personal, but also political as the films, taken as a whole, reflect the perpetual rise and fall of democracies (the Republic) and dictatorships (the Empire).

Overall, though, Lancashire sees the repetitions as playing a significant part in the design and purpose of the films.

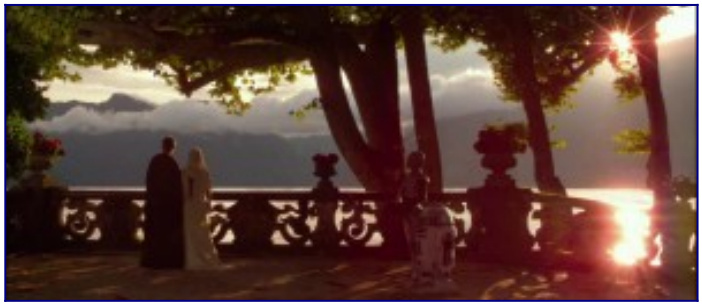
Now, Lucas has spoken often about the use of repetition in *Star Wars*. He typically puts it in a musical context: "[*Star Wars*] is purposely written like a piece of music, with themes that repeat themselves in different ways, and ideas that reprise from one generation to the next." [12] However, in *The Beginning*, a documentary on the making of *Episode 1*, he instead likens the repetitions to poetry: "Instead of destroying the Death Star [like Luke], [Anakin] destroys the ship that controls the robots. It's like poetry. Every stanza kind of rhymes with the last one." [13]

Consider Mike Stoklasa unimpressed: "That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard." [14]

Nevertheless, let's put Stoklasa's personal feelings aside and stick with the rhyming idea for the moment. Now, it should be fairly evident at this point that *Menace* and *A New Hope* are intricately woven together. In fact, even the episode titles themselves are connected, both thematically (menace/evil and hope/good) and structurally (article-adjective-noun).

But what about the other episodes?

Well, to take Lucas's poetry analogy one step further, if the *Star Wars* films are a six-stanza poem, and each film represents one stanza, then the rhyme scheme is ABC A'B'C'. That is, *Menace* (A) corresponds with *A New Hope* (A'), *Clones* (B) corresponds with *Empire* (B'), and *Sith* (C) corresponds with *Jedi* (C'). And as mentioned elsewhere, this is clearly evidenced by comparing the final shots (or almost final, in the case of *Empire*) of each pair.



So, if we were to examine the other two pairs of corresponding films, we would find that the episodes in each pair are related to each other in much the same way that *Menace* is related to *A New Hope*. This, according to Lucas, is done to parallel the journeys of Luke and Anakin: “It’s very, very clear in the two trilogies that I’m putting the characters in pretty much the same situations sometimes even using the same dialogue so that the father and son go through pretty much the same experience.” [15]

That’s all well and good but what about our original question: Why does the beginning of *Menace* reflect the beginning of *Jedi*? It’s even more confusing now that we know that *Menace* clearly corresponds to *A New Hope*.

Are we any closer to explaining it?

No.

Not even close.

Because here’s the thing: The “intertextual patternings,” while critical to reading the films the way Lucas intended, are actually small pieces of a much larger, more complex puzzle. And while many have unknowingly stumbled upon some of the pieces over the years, no one has discovered the underlying pattern and discussed how all of the pieces fit together and what the completed picture looks like (and possibly represents)—until now.

And it starts with a little-known ancient literary form that scholars have identified as “ring composition.”

From millennia-old Chinese writings to the epic poetry of Homer to the Bible, ring composition is a structure commonly found in ancient texts all over the globe—transcending time, culture, and geography. Social anthropologist Mary Douglas explains the technique in her book *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition.* And for starters, she writes that the form "comes in many sizes, from a few lines to a whole book." [16]

In its simplest and most popular form, it is know as "chiasmus"—a figure a speech in which key words or phrases are repeated in two successive clauses or sentences, but in reverse order. For example, John F. Kennedy's famous line, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." The second clause is a reversal of the first. So, the words are arranged in an ABB'A' fashion: country(A) you(B) you(B') country(A'). [17]

A ring composition, according to Douglas, is essentially a "large-scale, blown-up version of the same structure." [18] (It's also commonly referred to as "chiastic structure" or "inverted parallelism.")

Here's how it works:

The story is organized into a sequence of elements that progress from a beginning to a well-marked midpoint. Then, the ring turns and the first sequence of elements is repeated in *reverse order* until the story returns to the starting point.

That means the first and last elements correspond to each other, the second and second-to-last elements correspond to each other, the third and third-to-last elements correspond to each other, and so on, creating a sort of circle or mirror image. If we assign letters to each element, the pattern is ABC C'B'A' (similar to the JFK example above).

The correspondences between matching elements (or sections) are usually signaled by clusters of key words that appear in both items of a pair. They often indicate thematic links between the sections [19] so "one section has to be read in connection with another that is parallel because it covers similar or antithetical situations." [20] It's similar to the way the rhyme scheme of a poem works, but instead of rhyming sounds, the author parallels and contrasts *ideas.*

So, by now you're probably wondering what any of this has to do with *Star Wars*?

Well, as this essay will show, the six *Star Wars* films together form a highly structured ring composition. The scheme is so carefully worked out by Lucas, so intricately organized, that it unifies the films with a common universal structure (or what film scholar David Bordwell might call a "new formal strategy"), creating a sense of overall balance and symmetry.

At the same time, Lucas's use of this ancient form revises our readings of the films and the saga as a whole, and opens up new ways of thinking about *Star Wars*. It also allows us to gain a much greater understanding and appreciation for the films, and gives us a deeper sense of the magnitude of Lucas's accomplishment.

Because contrary to Stoklasa's claims that the prequels show a "lack of vision or originality" on the part of Lucas, the ring composition reveals quite the opposite. Lucas's vision is almost startlingly ambitious and, to my knowledge, unlike anything that's ever been attempted before in the history of cinema (proving once again that the six *Star Wars* films deserve far more serious critical attention than they've received). The word "brilliant" is often overused when discussing movies, but this is one occasion when it's truly warranted.

The Rules of Ring Composition

Douglas provides seven rules for identifying ring compositions. She's quick to point out, however, "they are not rules in the sense of there being something hard and fast about them. Breach carries no penalties, but insofar as they are commonly observed they are like rules. They are responses to the technical problems of coming back gracefully to the start." [21] The rules are as follows:

1. Exposition or Prologue: "There is generally an introductory section that states the theme and introduces the main characters," explains Douglas. "You can call it a prologue. It sets the stage, sometimes the time and the place. Usually its tone is bland and somewhat enigmatic. It tells of a dilemma that has to be faced, a command to be obeyed, or a doubt to be allayed. Above all, it is laid out so as to anticipate the mid-turn and the ending that will eventually respond to it." [22]

2. Split into two halves: The ring composition must split into two halves at the midpoint. Says Douglas: "If the end is going to join the beginning the composition will at some point need to make a turn towards the start. The convention draws an imaginary line between the middle and the beginning, which divides the work into two halves, the first, outgoing, the second, returning." [23]

3. Parallel sections: The two halves of the ring must be arranged in parallel. According to Douglas, this is done by making separate sections that are placed opposite each other across the central dividing line (one on each side of the ring). "Each section on one side has to be matched by its corresponding pair on the other side." [24]

4. Indicators to mark individual sections: The individual sections of the ring composition must be clearly marked so the reader knows where each section starts and stops. [25]

5. Central loading: Whereas modern stories are usually presented in a clear, linear fashion with the climax occurring near the end, ring compositions tend to place the climax or central crisis of the narrative in the middle (with the parts proceeding the middle moving towards it, and the parts following the middle moving away from it). "One clue that the middle has been reached," says Douglas, "is that it uses some of the same key word clusters that were found in the exposition. As the ending also accords with the exposition, the mid-turn tends to be in concordance with them both. Then the whole piece is densely interconnected." [26] In addition, the most important message of the work tends to be delivered at the turn or the center of the ring.

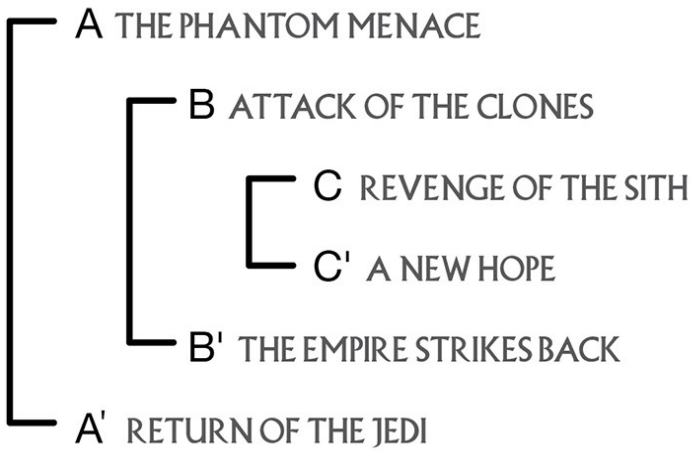
6. Rings within rings: A large ring composition may, in fact, include smaller rings. "Some rings emphasize the division into two halves by making each half a ring," says Douglas. "A large book often contains many small rings. They may come from different sources, times, and authors. One large ring can be composed entirely from minor rings strung together in groups. This practice makes the ring form ideal for incorporating old materials, as in the Bible." [27]

7. Closure at two levels. Finally, the ending of a ring composition must join up with the beginning and make a clear closure on both a structural and thematic level. "The exposition will have been designed to correspond to the ending. When it comes the reader can recognize it as the ending that was anticipated in the exposition." [28]

Douglas contends that to read a ring composition like a conventional narrative is to misinterpret it. [29] Instead, they are carefully designed to be read in a circular, rather than linear, fashion. And the full meaning of the text only becomes clear when the reader grasps the interplay between

corresponding elements. “Writings that used to baffle and dismay unprepared readers,” she says, “when read correctly, turn out to be marvelously controlled and complex compositions.” [30]

Before we plunge into the details of the *Star Wars* ring composition, though, it’s a good idea to see a high-level overview of how it works. So, here is the overall pattern or rhyme scheme of the *Star Wars* ring:



The pattern is ABC C’B’A’. Therefore, *The Phantom Menace* (A) corresponds to *Return of the Jedi* (A’); *Attack of the Clones* (B) corresponds to *The Empire Strikes Back* (B’); and *Revenge of the Sith* (C) corresponds to *A New Hope* (C’).

What this means is that the sequence of elements (or episodes) starts with *The Phantom Menace* and progresses to *Revenge of the Sith*, where events come to a crucial midpoint. Then, the ring turns and the first sequence (ABC) is repeated in reverse order (C’B’A’), bringing the story full circle back to the beginning.

And whereas corresponding sections in a ring composition are traditionally marked using clusters of key words, each pair of corresponding films in the *Star Wars* ring is meticulously matched using different aspects of cinema—including narrative structure, plot points, visuals, dialogue, themes, and music.

So, now let’s see how closely the six *Star Wars* films meet the above criteria. First, we’ll look at *Menace* as an introductory section and as a parallel episode to *Jedi*. After that, we’ll look at *Clones* as a parallel episode to *Empire*. Then, *Sith* to *A New Hope*. And finally, we’ll go over closing the ring, the all-important center, and the possible significance of the whole thing.

Notes:

1. Mike Stoklasa, “*Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* Review (Part 2 of 7)” *YouTube* video, 9:49, April 9, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZG1AWVLnl48.
2. Ibid.
3. Mike Stoklasa, “Mr. Plinkett’s *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* Review” *YouTube* video, 1:46:19, March 12, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABcXyZn9xjg.
4. Ibid.

5. Anne Lancashire, "*The Phantom Menace*: Repetition, Variation, Integration," *Film Criticism* 24, no. 3 (March 2000): 24.
6. Ibid.
7. Scott Chernoff, "The Plot Thickens," "*Star Wars" Insider*, July/August 2002, 58.
8. Lancashire, "*Menace*," 26.
9. Ibid., 26-27.
10. Ibid., 27.
11. Ibid., 28.
12. Chernoff, "Plot Thickens," 58.
13. George Lucas, "The Beginning: Making *Episode I*," Disc 2, *The Phantom Menace*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2001.
14. Stoklasa, "*Revenge of the Sith*."
15. George Lucas, "Audio Commentary," Disc 1, *The Phantom Menace*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2001).
16. Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, Terry Lecture Series, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 2.
17. For the purposes of this essay, I do not differentiate between chiasmus and antimetabole.
18. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 2.
19. Ibid., 33-34.
20. Ibid., 6.
21. Ibid., 35.
22. Ibid., 36.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 37.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 37-38.
29. Ibid., preface, x.
30. Ibid., 1.

Part I. Introductory Section: *The Phantom Menace*

According to the seven conventions of ring composition laid out by Mary Douglas in *Thinking in Circles*, a ring generally includes an introductory section that introduces the characters and provides important context for the following sections. The introductory section also states the major themes of the work. After all, a ring, says Douglas, is a "construction of parallelisms that must open a theme, develop it, and round it off by bringing the conclusion back to the beginning." [1]

As most everyone knows, the *Star Wars* saga consists of six feature films, divided into two trilogies (the original trilogy and the prequel trilogy). And as the first film in the saga, *The Phantom Menace* has the unenviable task of pulling triple duty. As the initial installment of the prequel trilogy, *Menace* has to stand on its own as a self-contained story and set up the next two episodes, much like *A New Hope* in the original trilogy. But *Menace* also has the added responsibility of laying the groundwork for the three original films, and thus the saga as a whole—no small feat to say the least.

"Everything had to be laid out in [*Menace*'s] script so that the next two scripts would follow as they should," says Lucas. "I also had to play this script against the three movies that had already been made, making sure everything was consistent and that I hadn't forgotten anything. There was a tremendous amount of minutiae in these movies that I had to consider." [2]

Now, if we look at the six films the way Lucas intended, as one book, or "one 12-hour movie in six parts," [3] then *Menace* essentially functions as a prologue—a sort of *separate* section that tells of events that precede the *main story* and that gives important background, setting, and character information.

From this perspective, then, *Menace*:

- Provides introductions to many of the 12-hour movie's major players, including the protagonist (Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader) and antagonist (Palpatine/Darth Sidious).

- Establishes the saga's primary setting, the galactic capital world of Coruscant, and explains the politics of the galaxy (offering a glimpse into the inner workings of the Republic, including the Senate and the Jedi Council).
- Builds the foundation for the 12-hour movie's two main story arcs: the fall and redemption of Anakin Skywalker and the rise and fall of an oppressive military dictatorship, the Galactic Empire. (The film adroitly parallels Anakin's rise from obscurity to future Jedi with Palpatine's rise to Supreme Chancellor—the single event that sets the stage for the political turmoil and eventual war in the following films.)
- Sets up one of the central ideas of the saga (the eternal struggle between the Jedi/light side and the Sith/dark side), the main problem that needs to be solved (restoring balance to the Force), along with the character who will solve it.

Menace also gives off the impression of being a prologue in other interesting ways. One way is that unlike the other five films, *Episode I* takes place during a period of "relative" peace in the galaxy, providing a kind of narrative baseline for the tumultuous events to follow. Another way is that some of the events in the film, particularly the invasion of Naboo, *appear* inconsequential and somewhat disconnected from the saga's main storylines that will kick in 10 years later in *Attack of the Clones* (of course, nothing could be further from the truth).

The tone of *Episode I* also helps distinguish the film from the others. It's the most light-hearted and childlike of all the films, designed, in part, to reflect Anakin's innocence and contrast his descent into darkness that follows. *Episode I* is also the only *Star Wars* film to feature a child at the center of the story. In fact, in the prequels we see Anakin at ages 9 (*Menace*), 19 (*Clones*) and 22 (*Sith*). And in the original trilogy, we see Luke at ages 19 (*New Hope*), 22 (*Empire*), and 23 (*Jedi*). So, portraying Anakin at such a young age clearly helps set *Menace* off from the rest of the pack.

It should also probably be noted that in terms of character arc, *Menace* provides *necessary* background on Anakin, establishing him as a wide-eyed, innocent young boy who likes to help others and, significantly, "knows nothing of greed," according to his mother. As Lucas correctly points out, in what appears to be a response to fans who were disappointed to see Darth Vader, one of cinema's most iconic villains, portrayed as a cutesy, *yippee!*-squealing tyke in *Menace*:

“[Anakin] has to start good and turn evil. You can’t have a monster turning into a monster. That’s not a story.” [4]

Interestingly, some of *Menace*’s most vocal critics actually lend further support to the idea of the film serving as a prologue. For instance, blogger Rod Hilton’s “Machete Order” (a suggested viewing order for the films) dispenses with *Episode I* entirely, not for simply disliking the film (although he does call it “a failure on every possible level” [5]) but also for the same reason a reader may skip a book’s prologue: Hilton thinks it’s just useless information.

> Luckily, George Lucas has done everyone a favor by making the content of *Episode I* completely irrelevant to the rest of the series. Seriously, think about it for a minute. Name as many things as you can that happen in *Episode I* and actually help flesh out the story in any subsequent episode…Search your feelings, you know it to be true! *Episode I* doesn’t matter at all. You can start the prequels with *Episode II* and miss absolutely nothing. The opening crawl of *Episode II* establishes everything you need to know about the prequels: a bunch of systems want to leave the Republic, they are led by Count Dooku, and Senator Amidala is a senator who is going to vote on whether the Republic is going to create an army. [6]

While Hilton and others may view *Menace* as skippable, this essay will, hopefully, prove otherwise —by showing that *Episode I* is an essential, indispensable component of the larger design of the series, the ring structure. It brings to mind something Lucas once told *Entertainment Weekly* while defending the film: “There’s actually a lot of stuff going on in [*Menace*], and it has to be there in order to make the story work.” [7]

Another important aspect of an introductory section is that it must acquaint the reader with the major themes of the ring composition. Knowing the themes helps to better understand what follows in the main body of the work. And without them, it becomes next to impossible to fully understand and interpret the completed ring.

That said, *Menace* offers a surprisingly rich thematic experience, setting up many of the themes that are developed throughout the saga (and as we’ll see later, correspond directly to the end of the ring). For example, Lucas reveals in the film’s making-of book that “duality is one of the main themes of

Menace." [8] And, as film scholar Anne Lancashire observes in her essay on *Episode I*, duality pervades the film:

> The large ensemble cast of characters features different kinds of doubles who metaphorically indicate opposing sides of human nature and/or the potential of any one individual to move in either direction. There are two good, largely non-aggressive Jedi (Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan) and two evil, aggressive Sith (Darth Sidious and Darth Maul) [further emphasized in the "Rule of Two"]…There are two Amidalas, the "masked" public queen (also represented by a decoy, fooling even the film's audiences) and the natural private Padme …There are two Chancellors, the seemingly weak Valorum and the aggressive Palpatine …There are two "mothers," Anakin's self-sacrificing birth mother and the maternal, sometimes aggressive Queen Amidala. There are also two peoples on Naboo, the peace-loving inhabitants ruled by Amidala and the warrior Gungans associated with a primal water world. [9]

Symbiosis, or life forms living together for mutual advantage, is another theme in *Menace*. And it's expressed in a couple of different ways. First, through the concept of midi-chlorians, which are microscopic life forms that reside within all living cells and communicate with the mystical Force. Lucas explains:

> Midi-chlorians are a loose depiction of mitochondria, which are necessary components for cells to divide. They probably had something—which will come out someday—to do with the beginnings of life and how one cell decided to become two cells with a little help from this other little creature who came in, without whom life couldn't exist. And it's really a way of saying we have hundreds of little creatures who live on us, and without them, we all would die. There wouldn't be any life. They are necessary for us; we are necessary for them. Using them in the metaphor, saying society is the same way, says we all must get along with each other. [10]

The second way Lucas establishes the theme of symbiosis is through the relationship between the surface-dwelling Naboo and the water-dwelling Gungans:

> One of the thematic devices … is that these two cultures come together and join forces and become friends and are treated as equals. Where at in the beginning of the film, they basically don't want to talk to each other. They don't want anything to do with each other. Each one is sort of an insular society. [11]

Another theme carefully woven throughout *Episode I* is greed. For example, the film's opening crawl describes a "greedy Trade Federation," a fact that Darth Sidious exploits over the course of the film to get his alter ego, Senator Palpatine, elected Supreme Chancellor. Qui-Gon uses the junk dealer Watto's greed to his advantage ("Greed can be a powerful ally," he says), to get the parts to repair the Queen's ship and to free Anakin (again, who "knows nothing of greed," says his mother). Also, Senator Palpatine says that the Senate is full of "greedy" delegates. And Yoda's observation that Anakin is afraid to lose his mother foreshadows the emotional greed at the heart of Anakin's fall from grace.

Finally, balance emerges as a prominent theme in the film, when the Jedi suspect Anakin may be the "chosen one" of ancient prophecy who will bring balance to the Force. The theme is also expressed through the Naboo and the Gungans, whose uneasy relationship reaches a balance at the film's conclusion, as the two cultures became joined in peace after a battle with the Trade Federation. In

fact, as Lucas points out, the balance between good and evil is "the overriding philosophy in *Episode 1*—and in all the *Star Wars* movies, for that matter." [12] (And over the course of this essay, it'll become clear that many of the themes in *Star Wars* tie directly into this overarching theme of balance.)

At this point, I think it's relatively safe to say that *The Phantom Menace* meets the requirements of a ring composition's introductory section. So, now let's see how Lucas arranged the films in parallel, one pair at a time.

Notes:

1. Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, Terry Lecture Series, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), preface, x.
2. Laurent Bouzereau and Jody Duncan, *The Making of "Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*," (New York: Ballantine Publ. Group, 1999), 4.
3. Jeff Jensen, "Plan of 'Attack.'" *Entertainment Weekly*, May 17, 2002, 30.
4. Jeff Jensen, "*Star Wars* Completes its Long Journey." *Entertainment Weekly*, May 16, 2005, http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1060829_3,00.html.
5. Rod Hilton, "The *Star Wars* Saga: Introducing Machete Order," *Absolutely No Machete Juggling* (blog), November 11, 2011, http://www.nomachetejuggling.com/2011/11/11/the-star-wars-saga-suggested-viewing-order/.
6. Ibid.
7. Jensen, "Plan of 'Attack,'" 30.
8. Bouzereau, *Making of "Episode I*," 8.
9. Anne Lancashire, "The *Phantom Menace*: Repetition, Variation, Integration," *Film Criticism* 24, no. 3 (March 2000): 33-34.
10. Evan Narcisse, "20,000 Per Cell: Why Midi-chlorians Suck," *Time*, August 10, 2010, http://techland.time.com/2010/08/10/20000-per-cell-why-midi-chlorians-suck/.
11. George Lucas, "Audio Commentary," Disc 1, *The Phantom Menace*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2001).
12. Bouzereau, *Making of "Episode I*," 8.

Part II. Parallel Sections: *The Phantom Menace* & *Return of the Jedi*

With the help of Anne Lancashire, a University of Toronto film professor, earlier we saw that *Menace*'s narrative was based on that of *A New Hope*'s. But, as parallel sections in a ring structure, the first section must match the last section (with each film representing an individual section of the ring). That means that *Menace* must correspond to *Jedi*. Does it? Let's find out.

First, here's a general breakdown of the three-act structure for each film. For simplicity's sake, the descriptions have been left intentionally broad.

	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III
THE PHANTOM MENACE	Two Jedi embark on a mission to rescue Queen Amidala from Theed Palace.	On the planet Tatooine, a native named Anakin Skywalker befriends the Jedi and helps them fix their ship. There is a great race involving podracers. Anakin leaves his mother to face the Jedi Council and become a Jedi. Amidala falls into Palpatine's trap and calls for a "vote of no confidence."	The primitive Gungans join forces with the Naboo to defeat the evil Trade Federation in a multi-strand battle.
RETURN OF THE JEDI	Two droids embark on a mission to rescue Han Solo from Jabba the Hutt's Palace.	On the planet Endor, the native Ewoks befriend the Rebels and help take them to the shield generator. There is a great chase involving speeder bikes. Luke leaves his friends to face Darth Vader and become a Jedi. The Rebels fall into Palpatine's trap and attack the Death Star.	The primitive Ewoks join forces with the Rebels to defeat the evil Galactic Empire in a multi-strand battle.

As you can see, the similarities are pretty striking. The general structural frameworks of the films are nearly identical. So, while parts of the story in *Menace* may be based on *A New Hope*, they have been placed firmly in the context of *Menace*'s corresponding episode in the ring composition: *Return of the Jedi*.

On *Episode 1*'s DVD commentary track, Lucas elaborates on the deliberate use of repetition throughout the saga, perhaps helping us begin to understand the bigger picture:

> It's a musical idea. You have a lyrical refrain and you keep playing it over and over again using different instrumentation, different octaves. It changes every time you rehear it. It's the same note played differently. I've tried to use that right from the very beginning when I did *Star Wars*. Literally it came out with something I was trying to do with [*THX-1138*]. Instead of three acts, there was almost like three different movies, but each movie is telling the same story in a different way. I became fascinated with that idea. It's kind of visual jazz. You go off on a riff on the same idea. You just take a concept and just interpret it differently visually. And there's a lot of that going on in these movies. I like the idea of cyclical motifs that keep occurring over and over and over again. [1]

So, based on the simple breakdowns above, if we take a closer look at the first act of *Menace*, we should expect to find correspondences to the first act of *Jedi*.

And, as it turns out, that's exactly the case.

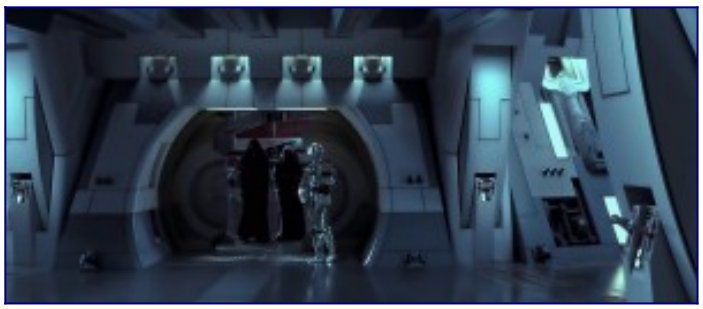
Beginnings, Middles, and Ends

It's important to note that the following examples focus only on the links between *Menace* and *Jedi*. While there are also many links, some subtle and not so subtle, that exist between *Menace* and *A New Hope*, those will have to wait for another time. Also, please keep in mind that the following is not meant to be exhaustive by any stretch of the imagination. There are plenty of others not mentioned here and probably many more yet to be discovered. And I look forward to seeing what other fans can spot.

Take, for instance, the opening scenes of *Menace*: Two Jedi, Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan, are sent to deliver the Chancellor's demands in hopes of settling a conflict between the Trade Federation and the Naboo. Now compare this to the opening scenes of *Jedi*: Two droids, C3PO and R2D2, are sent to deliver Luke Skywalker's message in hopes of settling the conflict between Jabba the Hutt and Han Solo.

Lucas has taken the general plot point of two characters sent to negotiate a kind of peace deal and interpreted it in two different ways, linking the films in the process. (Lucas even uses the same narrative device in both, by presenting the early parts of each film from the perspective of two characters.)

To help visually reinforce the connections between episodes, Lucas has the Jedi enter the Trade Federation Battleship much like another Jedi, Luke, enters Jabba's Palace:



You'll notice that in both films mysterious hooded figures walk through a similar shaped door in a shot that is conspicuously flat and two-dimensional. Notice also how the doors are positioned on opposite sides of the frame and actually open in opposite directions, horizontally in *Menace* and vertically in *Jedi*.

So, while the plot point of the Jedi's arrival in *Episode I* connects to the plot point of the droids' arrival in *Episode 6*, the *shot* of the Jedi's entrance into the battleship more closely resembles the shot of Luke's entrance into Jabba's Palace. Of course, Lucas arguably uses a visual element from the droids arrival as well, since a C3PO-type droid (silver, rather than gold) greets Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan when they enter the battleship.

But perhaps one of the most notable links between these initial scenes is made with a line of dialogue. And it's a line that many probably feel is nothing more than an exercise in fanservice: "I have a bad feeling about this."

It's easy to forget that this well-known phrase is spoken by both Obi-Wan in *Menace* and C3PO in *Jedi*, mere moments after they walk through the doors seen above. Yes, it may be a knowing wink to hardcore fans, but more importantly, like the corresponding plot points and visuals, it's a subtle marker that's joining the beginning of the ring to the end.

Let's keep moving through the rest of the first acts.

Precisely nine minutes into each film, there is a scene that takes place inside a palace throne room with a group of characters watching a holographic message.

Fifteen minutes into *Jedi*, Leia, disguised as a bounty hunter, brings Chewbacca to Jabba as her "prisoner." She then bargains with Jabba—using a thermal detonator—to get a better price for the wookiee. Shortly thereafter, Luke enters the palace and bargains with Jabba to free his captured friends. He tries to use a "Jedi mind trick" on Jabba and fails.

Meanwhile, fifteen minutes into *Menace*, Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan ask the Gungan Leader, Boss Nass, for help so they can warn the Naboo of an impending invasion. Not getting anywhere, Qui-Gon uses a Jedi mind trick on Boss Nass to secure a transport and free the captured Jar-Jar Binks. And this time, it works.

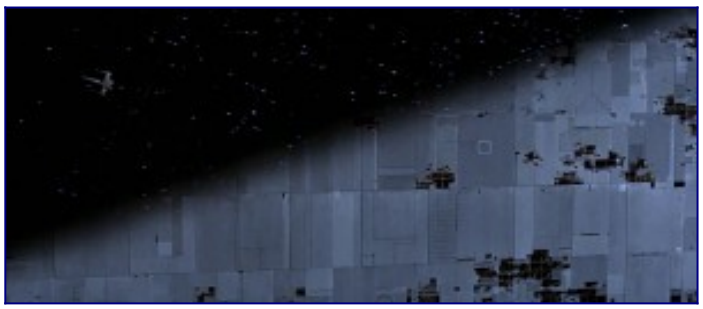
The visuals once again subtly reinforce the connections, as both Qui-Gon and Luke stand before a similar looking alien creature and are framed using nearly identical over-the-shoulder shots.

It's also interesting to point out that both the Gungan City and Jabba's Palace sequences represent different interpretations on the same mythological motif: the journey to the underworld. And as is usually the case, monstrous creatures lurk in these dangerous depths.

In *Jedi*, Jabba's prized pet lives just underneath the palace. In *Menace*, massive leviathans live in the watery depths of Naboo, below Theed Palace. The monsters chomp on hapless creatures in both films and, as Lancashire insightfully notes, both sequences were, at least in part, designed as visual metaphors: for greed/primal appetite in *Menace* ("There's always a bigger fish," observes Qui-Gon) [2] and for controlling negative emotions in *Jedi* (the monster is symbolically named Rancor). [3]

Following the rescue of Han Solo at the end of *Jedi*'s first act, Rebel forces travel to the planet Endor to destroy the shield generator that powers the Death Star's deflector shield. Only then can the attack on the Death Star commence. In *Menace*, after the rescue of Queen Amidala, the heroes travel to Tatooine to *fix* the *hyperdrive generator* that powers their ship's hyperdrive. Only then can Amidala plead her case on Coruscant.

At this point in both films, there is a transition to a scene that introduces a second Sith character into the film. Notice the similarities in transitions: a diagonal wipe (moving in opposite directions) to an establishing shot of a space station followed by a cut to the introduction inside.



As we move into the second and third acts of *Menace* and *Jedi*, you'll notice that while the correspondences continue, they don't always run concurrently. For example, in the second acts of both films, there is a chance encounter with the natives when an alien creature suddenly "thinks with their stomach." It's clearly a correspondence between the films, but the plot point occurs in the beginning of the second act in *Menace* and in the middle of the second act in *Jedi*.

The natives take the heroes back to their family/tribe, offer sanctuary, and eventually aid them in their quest. Interestingly, the heroes have dinner in Anakin's slave hovel in *Menace* whereas in *Jedi*, the Ewoks plan to serve up the heroes at a banquet in C3PO's honor.

And apparently no detail is too small in Lucas's effort to connect the films. In *Episode 1*, Anakin attaches C3PO's right eye. In *Episode VI*, a little alien creature pulls it out.

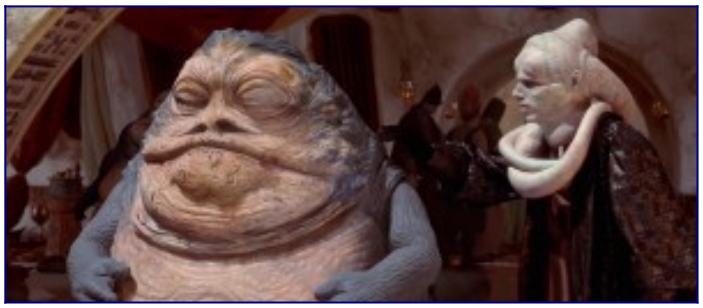
The pod race in *Menace* and the speeder bike chase in *Jedi* occur at the same time in both films, about halfway through (right around the one-hour mark). And there are numerous visual echoes between the two action sequences including:

Anakin and Leia both pilot their vehicles skyward and dive down from above.

And Anakin, like Luke, becomes caught in a chase-ending entanglement.

After getting knocked off her speeder bike in *Jedi*, Leia is discovered by an Ewok named Wicket, who, as *Star Wars* fans know, was played by actor Warwick Davis. The actor only appears in one other *Star Wars* film: *Menace*. He plays Anakin's alien friend and a crowd spectator during the pod race.

Also, after the pod race, Jabba's right-hand man has to wake the sleepy gangster from his "nap." In *Jedi*, the same right-hand man has to wake Jabba up to alert him to Luke's arrival.



Both Anakin and Luke make a fateful decision to leave loved ones at approximately the same time in each film, right around the 75-minute mark. Anakin leaves his mother to seek out his true destiny and become a Jedi. Likewise, Luke leaves his sister and friends to fulfill his destiny: confront Darth Vader and become a Jedi. And significantly, Anakin's destiny is only fulfilled when Luke fulfills his.

In *Jedi*, Luke's compassion for his father leads him to surrender himself to Vader, in an effort to draw his father back from the dark side. In *Menace*, Amidala's compassion for her people, who are suffering under occupation by the Trade Federation, leads her to travel to Coruscant and argue for political intervention.

However, in doing so, she *unknowingly surrenders* herself to Palpatine, who as Darth Sidious, has spent the film trying to capture the Queen so she'll sign a treaty that legitimizes the occupation. She walks right into the enemy's hands without even realizing it.

In a nice, subtle touch, Palpatine greets Amidala upon landing in Coruscant and says, "It is a great *gift* to see you alive, Your Majesty" (emphasis mine). And again, the scene in *Menace* plays at approximately the same point in the film as its corresponding scene in *Jedi*.

Consequently, Amidala is manipulated by Palpatine into calling for a "vote of no confidence" in the current leadership which paves the way for Palpatine's election to Supreme Chancellor—effectively putting an end to the Republic. Amidala, like the Rebels in *Jedi*, have fallen into a trap. (Also,

notice how the next scene in *Menace* takes place, appropriately enough, on a balcony as the sun sets on Coruscant.)

Rereading *Jedi* in light of *Menace*, there is now added meaning to the Emperor's attempt to lure the Rebels into his elaborate spider web. Take these two exchanges between the Emperor and Vader in *Jedi*.

The first one takes place when the Emperor arrives on the Death Star:

> **VADER:** The Death Star will be completed on schedule.
> **EMPEROR:** You have done well, Lord Vader. And now I sense you wish to continue your search for young Skywalker.
> **VADER:** Yes, my Master.
> **EMPEROR:** Patience, my friend. In time he will seek you out. And when he does, you must bring him before me. He has grown strong. Only together can we turn him to the dark side of the Force.

VADER: As you wish.
EMPEROR: Everything is proceeding as I have foreseen. [4]

The second exchange takes place later in the film when Vader informs the Emperor that a small Rebel force, including his son, has penetrated the shield and landed on Endor:

EMPEROR: Then you must go to the Sanctuary Moon and wait for them.
VADER: *(skeptical)* He will come to me?
EMPEROR: I have foreseen it. His compassion for you will be his undoing. He will come to you and then you will bring him before me.
VADER: *(bows)* As you wish. [5]

We now know that everything is proceeding as the Emperor has foreseen in *Jedi* because he went through an uncannily similar experience in *Menace*. There is no need for Darth Vader to search the galaxy for Luke, in the way that Darth Maul searched for Amidala, because, as the Emperor learned, Luke will ultimately come to Vader just like Amidala came to Palpatine. So, in *Episode 1*, Palpatine learns of the "flaw of compassion." In *Episode 6*, he fully exploits it.

Ninety minutes into *Menace*, Anakin is brought before the Jedi council. At the same moment on the other side of the ring composition in *Jedi*, Luke is brought before the Emperor. Notice the similarities between the Emperor's tower and the Jedi Temple as well as the use of complementary colors inside the locations.

The interplay between the two scenes also places added emphasis on an important aspect of *Star Wars*: recognizing and controlling your emotions. In *Menace*, Yoda senses great fear in Anakin (of losing his mother), and warns him, “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.” In *Jedi*, Luke nearly turns to the dark side following the same logic when the Emperor plays on Luke’s fear for the safety of his friends (Vader, in turn, plays on Luke’s fear of Leia being turned to the dark side). And we can now see that the strategy behind the Emperor’s Machiavellian plan to turn Luke’s fear into aggression stems largely from the events in *Episode 1*.

Here’s how: Frustrated by the Senate’s inaction to resolve her planet’s crisis, Amidala makes a surprising decision to return to Naboo. She tells Palpatine: “I fear by the time you have control of the bureaucrats, Senator, there will be nothing left of our cities, our people, our way of life.” And flying back to Naboo, the young Queen—a staunch pacifist—makes an even more surprising decision: she’s going to fight. Not only that, but she’s going to war.

Amidala has let her emotions get the best of her, turning to aggression to “take back what’s ours” and escalating tensions on her planet into a full-blown conflict. It’s a far cry from someone who would “not condone a course of action that will lead us to war,” at the start of the film. And while Amidala’s impulses may be right, her methodology is wrong. Even Darth Sidious, upon learning that Amidala is going to attack, remarks “This is an unexpected move for her. It’s too aggressive.” And when he learns about her army he says, “She is more foolish than I thought.”

Making matters worse, Amidala’s emotions have clouded her judgment. She doesn’t realize that the “Battle of Naboo” is at this point an unnecessary war, with the eventual outcome being something of a pyrrhic victory. Sidious has already won. The whole invasion was one elaborate plan to propel Senator Palpatine into the highest office in the galaxy. It’s “the basis for the whole plot of the movie,” says Lucas. [6]

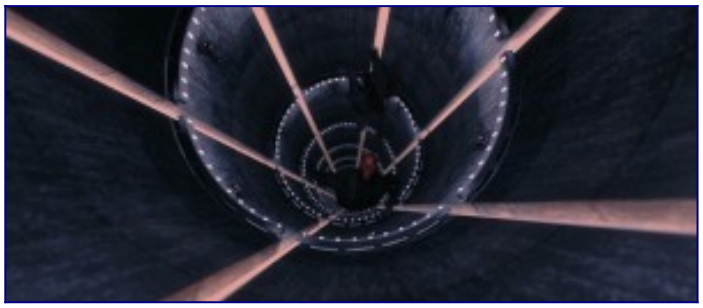
So, here again, we see Palpatine observing Amidala’s behavior and learning how compassion and fear can be manipulated for his own nefarious purposes. And this is precisely how the Emperor learns to goad Luke into fighting at the end of *Jedi*. In other words, *Menace* is the setup and *Jedi* is the payoff.

This takes *Menace* into its final act, where the correspondences to *Jedi* become hard to miss. Both episodes feature multiple battles taking place simultaneously: a space battle, a ground battle, and a lightsaber duel. However, there is a small reversal of sorts. In *Jedi*, deactivating the shield generator on the ground allows the Rebels to attack in space. In *Menace*, knocking out the battleship in *space* immobilizes the droid army on the *ground*.

In addition, both films feature:

A technologically advanced society versus a more primitive people (relatively speaking, of course)

A Sith falling down a deep chasm to his death



A slain Jedi being cradled near the edge of a bottomless pit

And a funeral pyre.

On a musical note, the joyful parade music at the conclusion of *Menace* is actually a light, upbeat version of the exceptionally dark Emperor's theme from *Jedi*, eerily foreshadowing the terrible events to come.

There is, however, one extremely subtle, but significant, correspondence between the final battles that deserves a bit more attention. In *Menace*, as David Begor so perceptively points out in his *Bright Lights Film Journal* article: "Amidala's misguided assault on the forces of the Trade Federation would backfire, a pyrrhic victory possible only once the deliberate (in the case of the Gungan Army and Amidala) or accidental (as with Obi Wan and Anakin) disarmament of the protagonists had been engineered deus ex machina." [7]

Indeed, after the last instance of disarmament (Darth Maul kicking Obi-Wan's lightsaber down the reactor shaft), the film immediately cuts to Anakin blowing up the Federation battleship, disabling all of the battle droids on Naboo.

Now, if this sounds a bit familiar, it's because a very similar situation occurs at *Jedi*'s climax.

Sensing that Luke has a twin sister, Darth Vader threatens to turn her to the dark side. Enraged, Luke attacks Vader in a frenzy of hate and severs his father's mechanical hand. He then realizes he is becoming the very thing he sought to destroy. Luke refuses the Emperor's command to kill Vader and instead disarms himself. The film then cuts to Han running out of the Imperial bunker on Endor and then to the destruction of the shield generator dish that defends the Death Star, allowing the Rebels in space to destroy the battle station and achieve victory.

Both of these instances are—to borrow a phrase from Jungian analyst Steven Galipeau's book *The Journey of Luke Skywalker: An Analysis of Modern Myth and Symbol*—"highly synchronistic events." [8] Synchronicity, for those unfamiliar with the concept, is "the experience of two or more events that are apparently causally unrelated or unlikely to occur together by chance, yet are experienced as occurring together in a meaningful manner." [9] (Jung once defined it as a "meaningful coincidence.")

Galipeau writes of the scene in *Jedi*: "Precisely when Luke successfully renounces the Emperor's efforts to turn him to the dark side, the external forces that the Emperor had thought impregnable are destroyed." [10] In other words, an inner event—Luke achieving a mature understanding of his emotions—corresponds in time to an outer triumph.

Now, despite the similar instance of synchronicity, no such understanding takes place at the end of *Menace*. Rather, the characters remain unaware of the actual and potential dangers that exist, both internally and externally. Thus, victory in *Menace* (if you can even call it that given Palpatine's rise to power) still occurs immediately after disarmament, but unlike *Jedi*, it is largely accidental and ultimately short-lived. Real, lasting peace and harmony, we learn at the end of the saga, can be achieved only through compassion, mutual self-sacrifice, and mature self-awareness and self-control. [11] Or as Begor nicely puts it, "It is only by mastering the evils that lurk within themselves that its heroes ultimately conquer those that threaten them from without." [12]

The end of *Menace*, then, subtly anticipates the final victory at the end of the saga. And in both films, the editing, or more specifically the sequencing of events, is used to communicate a strong moral message about the importance of recognizing and dealing with negative emotions, aggression and violence.

It's also interesting to watch how Lucas cleverly conveys the unchecked emotions and aggression of the characters at the end of *Menace*. For example: The Jedi, acting overly aggressive, are seen behind red force fields. (In the *Star Wars* universe, red is, of course, associated with the dark side, and anger and aggression.)

After Qui-Gon is killed, an angry and anxious Obi-Wan is conspicuously placed on the far right side of the screen before ferociously attacking Darth Maul, who's on the far left side of the screen. In traditional film language, the "bad guy" usually enters from the right side of the screen and moves right to left. Conversely, the "good guy" usually enters from the left and moves left to right. [13] It's no surprise, then, that moments later, Obi-Wan is pushed into a pit, hanging on for dear life.

After Anakin's ship skids into the battleship's hangar he says "everything's overheated" (providing a nice bit of commentary on events) and we see that all the lights inside are now red. Then, right after Darth Maul pushes Obi-Wan into the pit and kicks his lightsaber over the edge, Anakin's ship suddenly regains power and the lights turn green. (In *Star Wars*, green is strongly associated with the light side as well as life and peace.)

Finally, though, I'd be remiss in not pointing out perhaps the most significant correspondence that exists between *The Phantom Menace* and *Return of the Jedi*.

The bodily function humor.

Yes, fans who decried the inclusion of both a "poop gag" and a "fart joke" in a *Star Wars* film may now find some solace in the fact that they were meant to serve, at least in part, a greater purpose: to connect the beginning of the ring to the end—or more accurately, the *other* end. Because *Jedi*, if you'll recall, includes two "burp jokes."

It's nice to see Lucas isn't taking this whole affair too seriously.

Overall, it should be clear by now that *Menace* meets both the introductory and parallel sections requirements for a ring composition set by Douglas. Not only was *Menace* deliberately designed to match *Jedi* through a series of complex correspondences, but more importantly, *Episode I* sets up the conclusion of the saga as a narrative and thematic return to the beginning, as will be discussed in greater detail later. "When [the ending] comes," writes Douglas, "the reader can recognize it as the ending that was anticipated in the exposition." [14]

The Two Sides of the Force

Before we go on, there's one last thing that needs to be mentioned about *The Phantom Menace*. It may have gone largely unnoticed by many, but the film does introduce a new aspect to the concept of the Force. At its most basic level, there are two sides to the mystical energy field, the light and dark. But early in *Menace*, Qui-Gon makes matters more complex when he tells Obi-Wan to be mindful of the "Living Force." (In fact, Qui-Gon is the only character in all six films to even mention the Living Force.)

While left somewhat vague and open to interpretation, the use of the term does implicitly suggest the existence of another, perhaps deeper, aspect of the Force. Indeed, this was spelled out more explicitly by Lucas himself in the film's making-of book: "The Force itself breaks into two sides: the Living Force and a greater, Cosmic Force. The Living Force makes you sensitive to other living things, makes you intuitive, and allows you to read other people's minds, etc. But the greater Force

has to do with destiny. In working with the Force, you can find your destiny and you can choose to either follow it, or not." [15]

The Living Force is said to encompass both the light and dark sides. And the Cosmic Force is said to exist beyond the Living Force, that is, beyond the dichotomy of light and dark. Again, as we'll see a little later on, this has some interesting implications for the ring composition and how we ultimately view the films. But for now, let's move on to the next matching pair of films: *Attack of the Clones* & *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Notes:

1. George Lucas, "Audio Commentary," Disc 1, *The Phantom Menace*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2001).
2. Anne Lancashire, "*The Phantom Menace*: Repetition, Variation, Integration," *Film Criticism* 24, no. 3 (March 2000): 36.
3. Anne Lancashire, "*Return of the Jedi*: Once More With Feeling," *Film Criticism* 8, no. 2 (January 1984): 57-58.
4. Lawrence Kasdan and George Lucas, *Return of the Jedi*, Original Movie Script, (Monterey Park, CA: O.S.P. Publishing, Inc., 1994), 36.
5. Ibid., 61.
6. Lucas, "Audio Commentary," *Menace* DVD.
7. David Begor, "Defense of the Clones," *Bright Lights Film Journal*, November 2002. http://brightlightsfilm.com/38/clones1.php#.U9lUoVanGCs.
8. Steven A. Galipeau, *The Journey of Luke Skywalker: An Analysis of Modern Myth and Symbol*, (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), 242.
9. Wikipedia contributors, "Synchronicity," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synchronicity
10. Galipeau, *Journey*, 242.
11. For a more detailed explanation, please see Lancashire, "Complex Design in *The Empire Strikes Back*" and "*Return of the Jedi*: Once More With Feeling."
12. Begor, "Defense."
13. "Because the eye tends to read a picture from left to right, physical movement in this direction seems psychologically natural, whereas movement from the right to left often seems inexplicably tense and uncomfortable. The sensitive filmmaker exploits these psychological phenomena to reinforce the dramatic ideas. Frequently the protagonists of a movie travel toward the right of the screen, whereas the villains move toward the left" (Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 99).
14. Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, Terry Lecture Series, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 38.
15. Laurent Bouzereau and Jody Duncan, *The Making of "Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*," (New York: Ballantine Publ. Group, 1999), 8-9.

Part III. Parallel Sections: *Attack of the Clones* & *The Empire Strikes Back*

Every *Star Wars* film starts the same way: A title card reads "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." The main title zooms out over a field of stars. The episode number, name, and three paragraphs of text scroll up and away and fade into infinity. And finally, the camera pans down.

Okay, well *almost* every *Star Wars* film starts the same way. Immediately after the opening crawl in *Attack of the Clones*, for the first time in a *Star Wars* film, the camera pans up. So, why the change in direction? What, if anything, is Lucas up to? Literally.

To begin with, it's no secret that *Clones* corresponds closely to *Empire* (much like how *Menace* corresponds to *A New Hope*). In both films, there's a chase through an asteroid field, a bounty hunter named Fett, a dismembered C3PO, and a Skywalker who gets a limb amputated, just to name a few. Lucas noted the parallels just prior to the film's release:

> It starts out as a mystery—who's trying to kill the Senator, and why? But that's then juxtaposed against the love story, so I've got two stories being told simultaneously right from the beginning. I've done that before in the other movie, so stylistically, I'm staying reasonably consistent—not with *The Phantom Menace*, but more with *The Empire Strikes Back*. There are a lot of reverberations, scenes that are reprised, between *Empire* and [*Clones*]. [1]

Now, if we look at *Clones* in terms of the larger ring pattern, the film corresponds to *Empire* in the same way that *Menace* corresponds to *Jedi*, reinterpreting plot points, visuals, and other elements from beginning to end. In other words, *Empire* is fully reimagined within the context of its corresponding episode in the ring.

Except for one very important thing: *Clones* turns things on their head.

Again, to better understand what's going on, here's a general breakdown of just some of the events in both films:

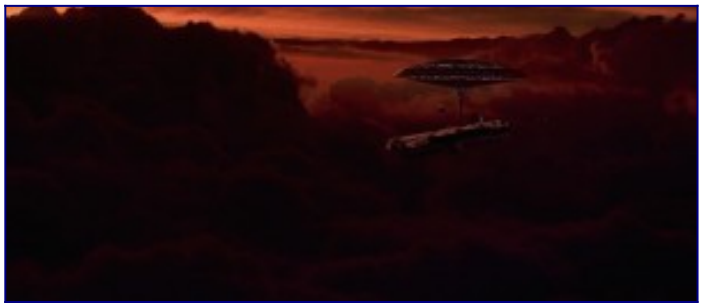
	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III
ATTACK OF THE CLONES	On Coruscant, Anakin lures a mysterious attacker to him by using Padme as bait. A bounty hunter escapes.	Anakin escorts Padme to safety, off planet—where they fall in love. Meanwhile, Obi-Wan travels to the faraway planet of Kamino in search of a mysterious bounty hunter named Jango Fett. Later, Anakin and Padme rush off to rescue Obi-Wan, who has been captured on Geonosis.	The Republic discovers the location of the hidden Separatist base on Geonosis and launches a major ground offensive. The Separatists evacuate.
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK	The Empire discovers the location of the hidden Rebel base on Hoth and launches a major ground offensive. The Rebels evacuate.	Han escorts Leia to safety, off planet—where they fall in love. Meanwhile, Luke travels to the faraway planet of Dagobah in search of a mysterious Jedi Master named Yoda. Later, Luke rushes off to rescue Han and Leia, who have been captured on Cloud City.	On Cloud City, Darth Vader lures Luke Skywalker to him by using Han, Leia, and Chewbacca as bait. A bounty hunter escapes.

Like the previous pair of films, the similarities are quite apparent. Only this time, some of the events in Acts I and III have switched positions so that parts of the plot unfold in the opposite direction. In other words, *Clones inverts* the structure of its corresponding film in the ring composition—and creates a kind of mirror-image symmetry between the films in the process.

So, here we see Lucas introducing an important new aspect to the ring structure. But to fully understand what he's doing, we need to do a little comparison.

First, let's take a closer look at the opening moments of *Clones*: A large Naboo Cruiser and three small escort ships (two in front, one behind) slowly descend into the galactic capital of Coruscant.

Now compare this with a sequence near the conclusion of *Empire*: Luke, dangling from a weather vane under Cloud City, is rescued by Leia and Lando, and together they speed away in the Millennium Falcon—hotly pursued by three Tie Fighters.



So, whereas *Empire* ends with three small ships chasing a large ship that's escaping a city in the clouds, *Clones* begins with three small ships escorting a large ship that's landing among mile-high skyscrapers shrouded in dense fog—a veritable city in the clouds.

In other words, *Clones* begins where *Empire* ends.

Not only that, but *Clones* ends where *Empire* begins: in the underground caverns of a barren wasteland. Geonosis in *Clones* and Hoth in *Empire*.

However, it's important to point out that *Clones* is not telling the story of *Empire* in reverse. That is, the change in direction between the films should not be read in terms of going backwards and forwards. Instead, it should be read in terms of high and low.

To put it simply, *Clones* starts in a high place (city in the clouds) and ends in a low place (caverns) and *Empire* starts low and ends high. What this means is that when the films are seen as parallel sections in the ring composition, the structure of *Clones* can be thought of as "descending" and the structure of Empire can be thought of as "ascending."

Therefore, *Clones* marks the point at which the ring structure begins to *descend* towards the midpoint of the ring at the end of *Sith* (the ring's lowest point). After that, the ring will then begin to *ascend* back towards the starting point. This is one of the reasons, then, why Lucas structured the films as kind of opposites.

The change in direction also serves a significant thematic purpose: it illustrates the beginning of Anakin's metaphorical "descent into hell." As the story begins its descent into darkness in *Clones*, the ring structure itself, conveyed through the film's structure, also begins to descend. And as we'll see in the next section, when Anakin begins his metaphorical "ascent to light" in *A New Hope*, the ring structure will also begin to ascend. So, rather impressively, form reflects content and content reflects form—as is often the case in poetry.

And the pan up after the opening crawl, as you may have guessed by now, is a simple visual cue that's used to signal both the literal and figurative changes in the story's direction. (The opening shot is a fairly standard *Star Wars* opening, it's just upside down. The planet is at the top of the frame, instead of the bottom. And the ship flies in from the bottom, rather than the top. The Queen's ship is upside down relative to the planet so it flips over.)

The film's opening visuals of descending aircraft also help set the trajectory, as does the subtextually loaded opening line, spoken by a lieutenant aboard the Naboo cruiser: "Senator Amidala, we're making our final approach into Coruscant."

That being said, when viewing *Clones* from this new perspective, the subtle correspondences between the film's *early* scenes and *Empire*'s *later* scenes become apparent.

The Beginning and the End

From the dizzying heights of Senator Amidala's high-rise apartment on Coruscant to the heavenly metropolis in the skies over Bespin, both film's feature a sequence that starts at breathtaking (and morally symbolic) heights and takes its characters on a downward journey into the city's dark underbelly, where the sequence ends.

As mentioned above, Anakin uses Padme to lure out an assassin during the sequence in *Clones*:

> *Obi-Wan checks a palm-sized view scanner he has pulled out of his utility belt. It shows a shot of Artoo by the door, but no sign of Padme on the bed.*
> **OBI-WAN:** What's going on?
> *Anakin shrugs.*
> **ANAKIN:** She covered that camera. I don't think she liked me watching her.
> **OBI-WAN:** What is she thinking?
> **ANAKIN:** She programmed Artoo to warn us if there's an intruder.
> **OBI-WAN:** It's not an intruder I'm worried about. There are many other ways to kill a Senator.
> **ANAKIN:** I know, but we also want to catch this assassin. Don't we, Master?
> **OBI-WAN:** You're using her as bait?
> **ANAKIN:** It was her idea… No harm will come to her. I can sense everything going on in that room. Trust me. [2]

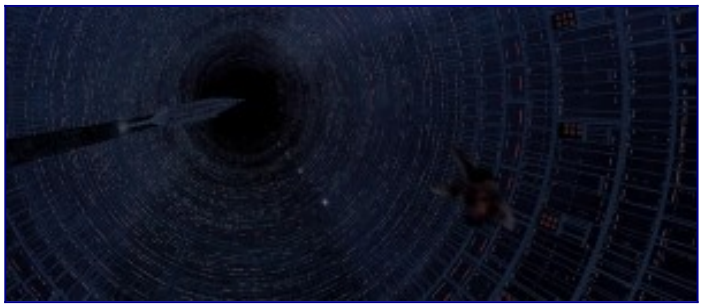
And in the sequence in *Empire*, Vader sets a trap for Luke using Han, Leia, and Chewbacca:

> *The cell door slides open. Lando and two of his guards enter.*
> **LEIA:** Lando.
> **HAN:** Get out of here, Lando!
> **LANDO:** Shut up and listen! Vader has agreed to turn Leia and Chewie over to me.
> **HAN:** Over to you?
> **LANDO:** They'll have to stay here, but at least they'll be safe.
> **LEIA:** What about Han?
> **LANDO:** Vader's giving him to the bounty hunter.
> **LEIA:** Vader wants us all dead.
> **LANDO:** He doesn't want you at all. He's after somebody called Skywalker.
> **HAN:** Luke?
> **LANDO:** Lord Vader has set a trap for him.
> *Leia's mind is racing.*
> **LEIA:** And we're the bait. [3]

In *Clones*, the hero awaits the villain and in *Empire* the villain awaits the hero (although, things don't go so well for the "aggressor" in both instances). Also, notice the "Venetian blinds" lighting effect in Padme's room and the Cloud City cell.

In both films, the trap eventually leads to a character breaking through a window.

Significantly, both *Clones* and *Empire* feature the hero falling from a great height. Luke, who would rather die than join Vader, steps off a ledge and plummets down an airshaft in an act of self-sacrifice. Anakin, on the other hand, leaps from a speeder into a traffic-filled sky in an amazing act of hubris.



Like the Naboo cruiser descending through the skies of Coruscant, Anakin's fall is another good example of the "descent motif" employed early in the film. And if you play close attention you'll notice that *Clones*, like *Empire*, is rife with this kind of symbolic descent imagery that tends to serve several purposes, chief among them: it reflects the characters' (and Republic's) potential and actual moral descent—creating a strong thematic link between episodes.

In *The Journey of Luke Skywalker*, Jungian analyst Steven Galipeau adds that “Descent symbolism is generally related to achieving psychological and emotional depth, entering the unconscious and becoming more human. In Jungian terms, symbols of descent in dreams often refer to becoming more grounded or down-to-earth.” [4]

Continuing through the films, both the Coruscant and Cloud City sequences lead ever downward, deeper and darker into the bowels of the city, where a character ultimately loses an appendage to a lightsaber.

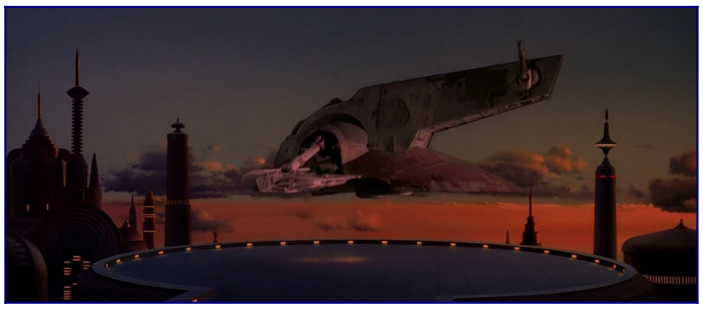
At this point it appears as though the echoes between *Clones* and *Empire* almost overlap, as both films are bookended with characters losing appendages. So, the bounty hunter losing her arm in the beginning of *Clones* also echoes the Wampa snow monster losing his arm at the beginning of *Empire*. And both of those instances are used to foreshadow the main character losing an appendage at the end of the film.

Here we also see *Clones* corresponding with *Empire* through the shared motif of dismemberment, which is commonly found in myths and fairy tales. Here's how Lucas describes it on *Empire*'s DVD commentary track, when C3PO is disassembled:

> It's a motif of the movies. In this case it's a physical manifestation but in the rest of [the movies], it's either an emotional manifestation or a personality manifestation, somebody who's sort of ripped themselves apart and is trying to put themselves back together again. So it's fun when you can take a literal character, in this case a tin woodsmen or Humpty Dumpty and break them all apart and have part of the movie be about how he gets put back together again physically, which is what Luke is trying to do, and what Han is doing in terms of his morality. But more importantly, in the end, it's what Darth Vader is trying to do. [5]

Finally, plot points at the end of each sequence also correspond. In *Empire*, at the bottom of Cloud City, a badly wounded Luke hangs upside down and is rescued by his friends. In *Clones*, outside of a nightclub at the bottom of Coruscant, the injured bounty hunter is not rescued by her "friend" Jango Fett, but instead betrayed and killed by him. Of course, there's also a betrayal at this point in *Empire* when Lando Calrissian double-crosses Han on Cloud City**.**

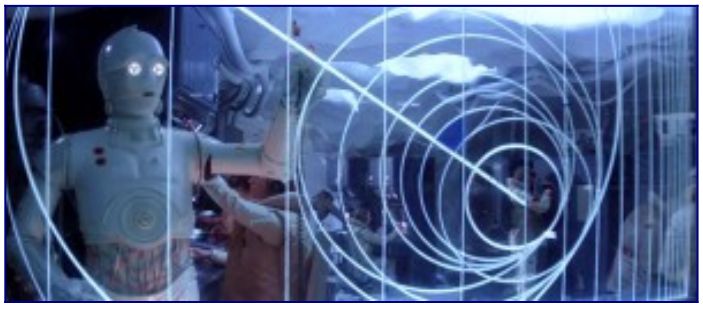
Most telling, though, is that Jango Fett avoids capture and flees the city, much like how Boba Fett escapes Bespin with Han Solo frozen in carbonite—meaning that both sequences end on a similar turning point that propels us into the next part of the story: characters need to find a bounty hunter.



The End and the Beginning

Seeing *Clones* in light of its topsy-turvy nature also reveals connections between the *end* of the film, when the Republic's clone army attacks the Separatists' droid forces on the Mars-like redrock planet of Geonosis, and the *beginning* of *Empire*, when Imperial forces invade the Rebels' headquarters on the icy planet Hoth.

For instance, the backdrops for both sequences are rocky, barren landscapes with cavernous interior locations—hangars, command centers, tunnels, and walkways—carved out of the environment.



David Begor astutely observes in his “Defense of the Clones” that both sequences cut between an invading army and an evacuating secret Rebel base. [6] (It’s also hard not to notice that one of the Republic’s enormous six-legged ground vehicles recalls the Empire’s iconic AT-AT Walkers.)

But, as Begor rightly points out, there’s an important distinction between the two sequences that adds significant thematic complexity to the saga: “As the title of [*Clones*] suggests, the Republic is the aggressor in the final battle, not the Separatists.” [7] So, by deliberately repeating and varying the Hoth sequence, and including such details as the precursor to the Imperial walker, Lucas “invites further doubt as to the moral virtue of the Republican assault, as does the generally right-to-left direction of their attack (the positive direction in film being of course left-to-right) and the reddish-brown haze that masks the battlescape. Clouds are symbols of moral ambiguity and blindness: this battle is relentlessly clouded by the Dark Side.” [8]

Other small details between the battle sequences also correspond. Thanks to quick thinking from a Skywalker, both Rebel and Republic forces successfully destroy enemy ships.

In *Empire*:

> **LUKE:** *(into comlink)* Rouge Group, use your harpoons and tow cables. Go for the legs. It might be our only chance of stopping them. [9]

And in *Clones*:

> **ANAKIN:** Aim right above the fuel cells.
> *Laser fire pelts the base of the TECHNO UNION ship. Rocked with explosions, it begins to tilt over and the Gunships split up, flying past.* [10]

Minutes into *Empire*, Han enters the main hangar bay of Echo Base, the Rebel headquarters carved out of the planet's frozen surface. It's probably no coincidence, then, that the battle on Geonosis reaches its climax in Separatist leader Count Dooku's secret hangar, a large rock-cut cave.

In the ensuing lightsaber duel with Dooku, Anakin loses his arm and is rendered unconscious. This echoes the start of *Empire* when Luke wakes up in the Wampa's ice cave—after being equally knocked out cold—and cuts off the snow creature's arm.

And just as Solo manages a last-minute escape before Imperial forces blast the Falcon, Dooku escapes Geonosis moments before Republic forces arrive.

In the closing montage of *Clones*, massive Republic assault ships, an early incarnation of the Star Destroyer, lift into space from Coruscant, on their way to thousands of star systems as the Great Clone War has begun. This is a clever inversion of *Empire*'s opening, where a Star Destroyer moves through space dispatching tiny probe droids down to planets all across the galaxy in search of Luke and the Rebels.

This brings *Clones* all the way to the beginning of *Empire*. So, just to reiterate, elements at the beginning of *Clones* correspond to elements at the end of *Empire*, and elements at the end of *Clones* correspond to elements at the beginning of *Empire*.

At the same time, however, moving forward through *Clones* reveals connections to *Empire* that run parallel, just like the connections between *Menace* and *Jedi*. In other words, beginning to beginning, middle to middle, and end to end. And the elements tend to correspond in the same way they did between *Menace* and *Jedi*. That is, interpreting the same general idea in a different way.

Beginnings, Middles, and Ends

Both films begin with different interpretations of descending spacecraft, an explosion, and a surprise attack. In *Empire*, a probe droid zooms down to Hoth and strikes the snowy landscape with an explosion. Luke notices the impact and goes to investigate when he's suddenly struck by the Wampa. In *Clones*, a Naboo cruiser descends into Coruscant and explodes seconds after landing, in a failed assassination attempt on Senator Amidala that instead claims the life of her decoy.

In both instances, the injured character ends up on the ground (laying in opposite directions).

Also, notice how the “blood markings” are placed on opposite sides of the characters’ faces.

A key plot point involving a kind of probe droid occurs early in the first act of both films. In *Episode II*, an assassin probe droid releases poisonous centipede-like creatures in the second attempt on Padme’s life. In *Episode V*, an Imperial probe droid alerts the Empire to the location of the secret Rebel base on Hoth.

Mirroring the overall narrative structure of *Empire*, *Clones* places its main characters together in the beginning, splits them apart in the middle (cutting back and forth between two parallel plotlines), and reunites them at the end when the plotlines converge in a dark climax.

In *Empire*, Luke travels to Dagobah in search of the mysterious Yoda, crash landing on the remote planet about 40 minutes into the film. At the same time in *Clones*, Obi-Wan's investigation into the assassination attempts on Senator Amidala leads him to Kamino, a planet that was erased from the Jedi archives. Unsurprisingly, both sequences correspond to each other in a number of interesting details.

As Luke approaches Dagobah in his X-Wing, Luke tells R2 he's picking up "massive life-form readings" and that "there's something alive down there." Dagobah is a wet and tropical world, a swamp planet teeming with primitive life.

Lucas strikes a similar chord with Kamino, a stormy planet covered entirely by oceans. *Mythmaking*, a behind-the-scenes look at *Attack of the Clones*, explains that "Lucas's watery vision

of Kamino stemmed from the logic that, because the sea is the cradle of all biological evolution, cloners might choose to base their operations on an ocean planet." [11]

When Luke first meets Yoda, he doesn't realize that the little creature is actually the Jedi Master he's looking for. Yoda, meanwhile, withholds his true identity from Luke and acts like an annoying child to test his patience and attitude.

Obi-Wan's first meeting with the Kaminoans puts an equally fresh spin on the old plot device of mistaken identity. Lama Su, the Prime Minister of Kamino, mistakes Obi-Wan as an emissary of the mysterious Jedi who ordered the creation of a clone army a decade before. Obi-Wan reveals his identity, but withholds the true nature of his mission and improvises to uncover the secrets behind the clone army.

The physical appearances of Yoda and the Kaminoans also reflect each other. Unlike Yoda's diminutive stature, crippled hobble, and broken syntax, the Kaminoans are very tall, long-necked creatures with fluid "Tai-chi type movements," [12] as *Clones* designer Rob Coleman puts it, and voices that are measured and melodic.

Meanwhile in *Clones*, a romance begins to blossom between Anakin and Padme, much like it does between Han and Leia in *Empire*. The “first kiss” scene in both episodes occurs at roughly the same time, and, in a subtle touch, both kisses are cut short. Also note how the actors’ positions are reversed between shots.

Back on Dagobah, inside the “mysterious creature’s” cramped hut, Luke sits by the fireplace and grows increasingly impatient with the creature to take him to see Yoda and eventually loses his temper. Disappointed, Yoda finally reveals his true identity and tells the spirit of Obi-Wan that Luke is not ready to be to a Jedi. When Luke disagrees, Yoda chastises him:

> Ready, are you? What know you of ready? For eight hundred years have I trained Jedi. My own counsel will I keep on who is to be trained! A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind. *(to the invisible Ben, indicating Luke)* This one a long time have I watched. Never his mind on where he was. Hmm? What he was doing. Hmph. Adventure. Heh! Excitement. Heh! A Jedi craves not these things. *(turning to Luke)* You are reckless! [13]

This is a critical scene for a couple of reasons. First, in screenwriting parlance, it represents the major plot point know as the “midpoint”—a scene or event approximately halfway through the script that often involves a change of character, reversal of some kind, or revelation that changes the direction of the story (and prevents the long second act from sagging).

In this case, the strange, little creature reveals that he is, in fact, the Jedi Master Yoda. And with Obi-Wan’s encouragement, Yoda reluctantly agrees to train Luke, pushing the plot in a new direction for the second half of the film.

Perhaps more importantly, though, is that the scene gives us an inner view of Luke that for the first time truly exposes his flaws: impatience, recklessness, and anger. (“Much anger in him,” says Yoda, “like his father.”) This is a very different character from the innocent fresh-off-the-farm boy from *A New Hope*.

Luke reveals the extent of his emotional immaturity when he tells Yoda, “I won’t fail you. I’m not afraid.” But Yoda responds to Luke’s denial of fear with a grave warning: “Oh, you will be. You will be.” Galipeau puts this in psychological terms for us:

> The integration of our emotions is critical to our maturation process … denied or repressed feelings are bound to erupt sooner or later. The challenge for us is to bear them—that is, *not* to lose patience. Then we must understand these feelings and direct them in more differentiated ways … Luke underestimates the depth and nature of his emotional life, especially on an archetypal level. An approach to life that invites one to "stretch out with your feelings" leaves one precariously vulnerable to eruptions of hidden emotions. Luke, according to Yoda, will experience fear he cannot even imagine. [14]

Notice the interplay between this scene and the midpoint scene in *Clones*. Anakin and Padme sit together—in an intimate fire-lit alcove no less—and talk about their growing feelings for each other and the impossibility of sharing a life together. As Lucas describes it:

> This is one of the pivotal scenes in their relationship where he reveals the pain and suffering he's been going through. It's intended to be overly dramatic, almost overly operatic in its emotional intensity on his part. He's young and he's spilling his guts out to her … In relation to their emotional maturity, he is much more impetuous and immature. She is older, and more reality based and can look forward and see the consequences of their actions. She's not going to let her emotions run rampant. [15]

Now for the first time Anakin's internal conflict, like Luke's, is laid bare and his flaws take center stage. He even shows a willingness to openly defy the Jedi code, which forbids emotional attachments, when he suggests that they could keep their love a secret. At this point, you can almost hear Yoda's words to Luke echoing through the scene. "A Jedi must have the deepest commitment, the most serious mind." Anakin, too, is reckless.

Above all, however, Lucas's skillful use of parallelism is a clear indication that the core psychological issues facing Anakin and Luke are the same. "You will see the father and son going through the exact same things," Lucas says. "It's just that they make difference choices." [16] So, like Luke, Anakin will experience fear he cannot even imagine.

But as Lucas noted shortly after the release of *Clones*, "The point is not that you're born evil. [Anakin] is a good kid, trying to be a good kid, and he grows up to be a good kid. It's simply that his emotions take him places he can't control." [17]

Padme ultimately refuses to go along with Anakin, a “pivotal moment for the rest of the film,” says Lucas. [18] And like the midpoint scene in *Empire*, the decision pushes the plot in a new direction for the remainder of *Clones*.

As Luke begins his Jedi training on Dagobah, we find him swinging on tree vines, running through the marshy jungles, and doing a front flip with Yoda strapped to his back. (Fun little detail: At almost the same time in *Clones* at the end of the fight between Obi-Wan and Jango Fett, Obi-Wan swings from a *wire* and does a *backflip*.)

Dagobah is, of course, a richly symbolic setting that represents a common mythological motif: the “sacred grove.” It’s a supernatural world home to magical creatures. Significantly, forests also symbolize the unconscious where inner darkness is usually confronted and the hero is transformed, often through important moments of realization and greater understanding.

Luke’s transformation takes place in the magic tree-cave scene. [19] He descends into the cave that is “strong in the dark side of the Force” and sees a vision of Darth Vader. Luke ignites his lightsaber and, as aggressor, decapitates the figure. The severed mask rolls to Luke’s feet and explodes, revealing his own face inside. The symbolism, explains Anne Lancashire in her 1981 essay, “Complex Design in *The Empire Strikes Back*,” is quite clear:

> The boy Luke, who until now, childlike, has thought of evil as something outside himself, is now beginning to recognize that evil comes from within, that every human being, including himself, contains the potential (or force) for evil (through emotions such as fear, anger, and hatred) as well as for good (through idealism, love, and faith). The evil Luke meets in the magic tree-cave—which he takes there with him, symbolized in the weapons Yoda had advised him to leave behind—is his own emotional dark side, which will destroy him if he does not learn through patience to control it. [20]

Luke has come face-to-face with what Carl Jung called the shadow, or the unknown “dark side” of our personality:

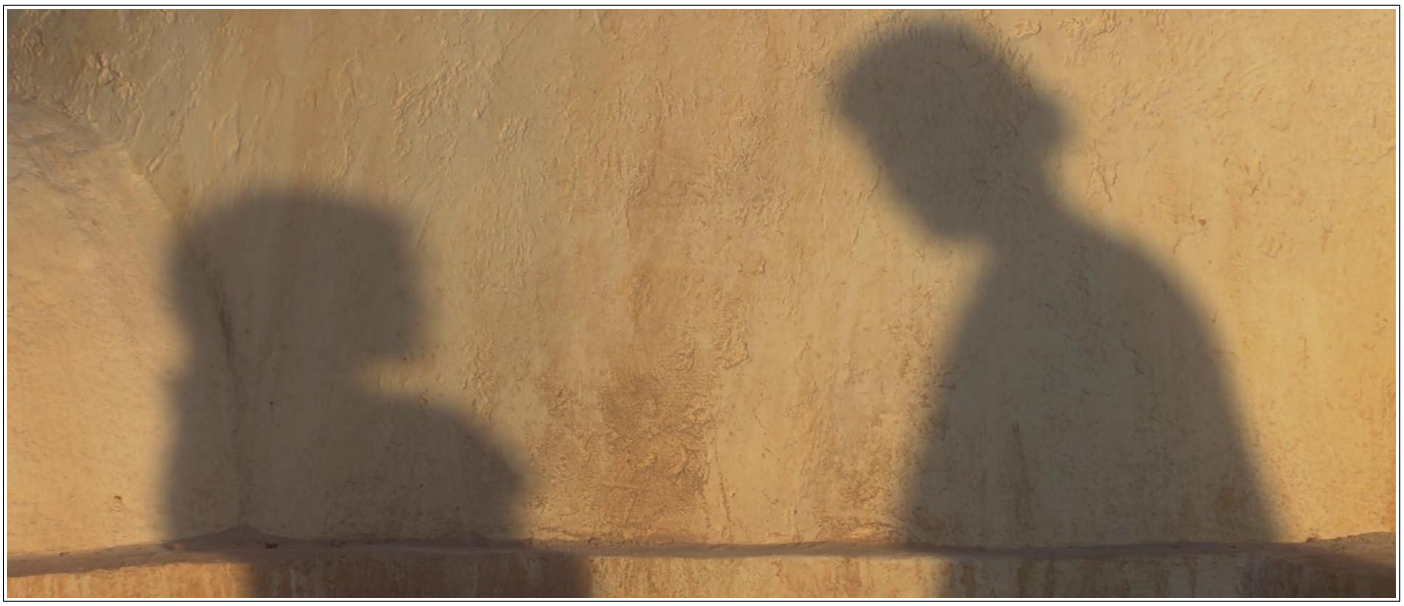
> Dark both because it tends to consist predominantly of the primitive, negative, socially or religiously depreciated human emotions and impulses like sexual lust, power strivings,

> selfishness, greed, envy, anger or rage, and due to its unenlightened nature, completely obscured from consciousness. Whatever we deem evil, inferior or unacceptable and deny in ourselves, becomes part of the shadow. [21]

Interestingly, Anakin has a similar encounter in *Clones*. The next time we see Anakin after his emotional conversation with Padme, he is having a nightmare about his mother in pain. And dreams, Jung reminds us, are one way the unconscious bubbles to the surface and expresses itself. [22]

Anakin's feelings for Padme are closely tied to his feelings for his mother, and the fact that he was separated from her at an early age and how that affected him are at the heart of his eventual turn to the dark side.

Anakin decides to return to Tatooine to save his mother, disobeying his mandate to remain on Naboo and protect Padme. Once there, he learns a terrible truth: his mother has been abducted by Tusken Raiders, and is most likely dead.



Refusing to accept his mother's fate, Anakin races off on a speeder bike to search for her and eventually finds the Tusken Raider's camp. From high atop a cliff, Anakin jumps (descends) down and sneaks in, where inside a tepee-like hut he finds his mother, bound and tortured, moments before her death. Anakin ignites his lightsaber and in a murderous rampage slaughters the entire tribe, even the women and children.

Anakin, much like his son, has descended into his own darkness and come face-to-face with his shadow, a part of himself he does not yet understand. This is Anakin's magic tree-cave. A visual comparison of the two scenes reveals just how much they correspond.

Both Anakin and Luke enter through a small, round opening.

They move in opposite directions on screen, Anakin left to right, Luke right to left.

Anakin finds his mother. Luke has a vision of his father.

After both Skywalkers succumb to their aggressive impulses, there is a decapitation involving a lightsaber. Anakin swings right to left, Luke swings left to right.

Both films then cut to Yoda, reacting.

You'll also notice that Lucas uses a symbolic red color scheme for Anakin's sequence and a blue one for Luke's.

It should be pointed out, though, that in terms of plot mechanics, Anakin's rash decision to return to Tatooine after he has a nightmare about his mother parallels Luke's decision to impetuously leave Dagobah after he has a premonition of his friends suffering (Luke, like Anakin, is ruled by his emotions and reckless nature and will also learn a terrible truth about a parent). However, the plot point itself happens sooner in *Clones*. We'll go over potentially why this is in a moment. But right now, let's go back to Kamino.

So, now that we know a little bit about the concept of the shadow, we can start to see how Lucas takes the concept one step further on the watery planet, and creates a unique correspondence between *Clones* and *Empire* in the process.

Now, in addition to the individual or personal shadow that Luke and Anakin face, Jung spoke of the dark aspects that are shared by a particular group of people or entire culture. He called this the collective shadow.

And Jung believed that if this "shadow of society" were left uncontrolled and projected onto others, it had the power to create a kind of collective psychosis and overwhelm civilization, exemplified by the horrors of Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Lancashire herself may have been referring to this concept in her essay "*Attack of the Clones* and the Politics of *Star Wars*" when she wrote:

> War in *Clones* is depicted as a tool, supported by profit-seeking big business, by means of which manipulative political leaders can achieve power and dominance over naive, greedy, and/or fearful leaders and their followers. Nations, like individuals, can be tempted toward the "dark side"—through ignorance, greed/appetite, and an emotionalism which significantly includes aggressiveness and fear. [23]

Part of the problem behind this collective shadow, Jung maintained, was the idea of "mass-mindedness." One author nicely describes it as "the reduction of individuals to anonymous, like-

thinking units of humanity, to be manipulated by propaganda and advertising into fulfilling whatever function is required of them by those in power." [24]

Star Wars fans can probably see where this is going.

When Obi-Wan travels to the aptly "hidden" planet (think hidden emotions of society at large), he lands in Tipoca City, a sleek, stilted structure that rises above the violent seas. (Water, of course, is often associated with latent emotions and, as Jung wrote, is the "commonest symbol for the unconscious." [25])

Inside the white, sterile, brightly lit interiors of the city, Obi-Wan learns about a massive army of clones the Kaminoans are producing for the Republic, secretly commissioned 10 years before without the knowledge or approval of the Jedi council or the Senate.

Kenobi then takes a rather disturbing tour of the complex and sees the clones in all stages of development, from vast embryonic "hatcheries" to thousands of fully grown soldiers marching in formation.

In *The Art of "Attack of the Clones*," concept artist Ian McCaig observes, "I guess you could say [the clones] don't have a soul. They're definitely missing something and are treated in a way that's dehumanizing." [26] Another artist, Edwin Natividad, referring to the classroom of adolescent clones, says "It's assembly line learning. No individuality." [27]

And as described in the book, the Kaminoans are "a species that may be pure science incarnate." [28] (Compare this with Yoda teaching Luke in the ways of the Force, which, with its emphasis on "feelings" and "intuition," exist on the opposite end of the thematic spectrum.)

The advanced technology and genetically minded nature of the Kaminoans come off like a cinematic version of Jung's notion that "One of the chief factors responsible for psychological mass-mindedness is scientific rationalism, which robs the individual of his foundations and his dignity. As a social unit he has lost his individuality and become a mere abstract number in the bureau of statistics." [29] And that, "In so far as society itself is composed of de-individualized

persons, it is completely at the mercy of ruthless individualists … the resultant extinction of the individual personality that makes it succumb so readily to a dictator.” [30]

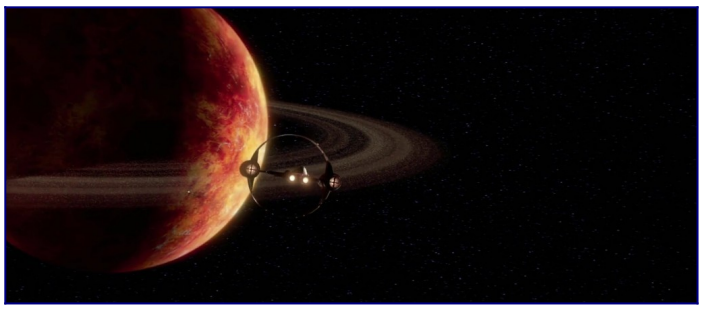
News from Kenobi about the clones causes greater unrest in the Senate and eventually leads to their bestowing upon Palpatine emergency wartime powers (and remarkably, along with the Jedi, giving implicit approval of breeding humans for war), enabling the Chancellor to use the clones to create a Grand Army of The Republic.

The collective shadow is rearing its ugly head.

“The heaping up of arms,” Jung darkly elaborates, “is itself a call to war. Rather must [nations] recognize those psychic conditions under which the unconscious bursts the dykes of consciousness and overwhelms it.” [31] In other words, the raging, swollen oceans of Kamino—that is, the deep, unexplored unconscious forces lurking within—threaten to engulf the entire galaxy.

After the tour of the cloning facility, Obi-Wan is taken to meet Jango Fett, who, as the genetic template for the clones, personifies the abstract concept of the collective shadow. Obi-Wan attempts to capture Jango, and following a clash on a rain-drenched landing platform, Jango escapes with his son, Boba.

Obi-Wan “shadows” Jango to Geonosis (reversing the situation in *Empire*, where Boba Fett tails Han Solo to Cloud City) and discovers a conspiracy of star systems, led by Dooku, that’s building its own army and plans to secede from the Republic.



The world of Geonosis is actually inhabited by insect-like creatures that live in underground hives. Lucas based them on termites. [32] And termites, of course, damage wood from the inside out so it's difficult to detect an infestation.

Thus, the backdrop for the film's climactic finale serves as a strikingly apt visual metaphor. As usual, Lancashire hits the nail on the head:

> The Republic falls from within, not to attack from without; as with the individual characters in the original trilogy, and also in this new trilogy, the danger—here to the state as a whole—is an unrecognized dark side of emotionalism in general, and especially of anger, love/patriotism, hatred, and fear, in the Republic at large, capitalized upon by ambitious or greedy leaders in order to manipulate events to their own political and economic advantage.[33]

Lucas briefly alluded to this point when he spoke with *Time* magazine in 2002:

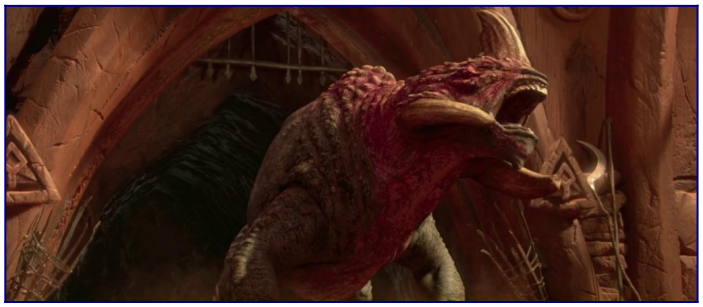
> All democracies turn into dictatorships—but not by coup. The people give their democracy to a dictator, whether it's Julius Caesar or Napoleon or Adolf Hitler. Ultimately, the general population goes along with the idea … What kinds of things push people and institutions into this direction? […] That's the issue that I've been exploring: How did the Republic turn into the Empire? That's paralleled with: How did Anakin turn into Darth Vader? How does a good person go bad, and how does a democracy become a dictatorship? It isn't that the Empire conquered the Republic, it's that the Empire is the Republic. One day Princess Leia and her friends woke up and said, 'This isn't the Republic anymore, it's the Empire. We are the bad guys.' [34]

Around 90 minutes into *Clones*, Obi-Wan is captured by Dooku's forces. At the same time in *Empire*, Han and Leia are captured on Cloud City. [35]

And it's here where we start to see potentially why Anakin's nightmare about his mother happens *earlier* in *Clones* than its corresponding plot point (Luke's vision about Han and Leia) occurs in *Empire.*The Han Solo frozen-in-carbonite plot thread left hanging in one of cinema's most memorable cliffhangers doesn't get resolved until the beginning of the next episode, *Return of the Jedi*. In terms of structure, the first act of *Jedi* essentially serves, in part, as the third act of *Empire*.

However, by placing Anakin's ordeal with his mother in the middle of *Clones*, the film is afforded more time to resolve the plot thread involving Obi-Wan's capture (and move the story forward to the start of the Clone Wars). And since the rescue of Han Solo takes place at the beginning of *Jedi*, it should come as no surprise then that the rescue of Obi-Wan in *Clones* contains allusions to the beginning of *Jedi*. For example:

The allegorical monsters in an arena

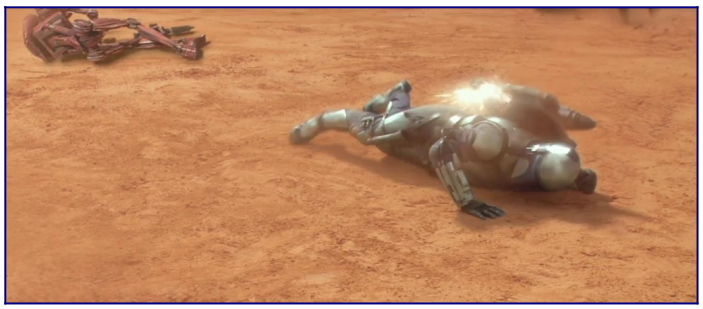


An execution scene

Anakin and Luke use a green lightsaber for the first time

Padme and Leia use a chain as a weapon

Jango and Boba Fett both roll around in the dirt and die after a jetpack malfunction



And a decidedly more sexual tone with Padme's midriff-baring outfit and "slave Leia."

What's more, *Clones* ends on a galactic-sized note that includes its biggest action set piece—an almost endless series of escalating climaxes as the Republic gets drawn into war with the Separatists. This is actually the opposite of *Empire*, which, with its unique structure, ends on a personal note and places its biggest action sequence (the Battle of Hoth) early in the film.

Ultimately, all of this helps give *Clones* a more traditional narrative structure, providing a strong counterpoint to *Empire*'s non-traditional structure (Lucas has described *Empire* as a film "with no beginning or end." [36]) More importantly, though, it's further evidence of Lucas using plot and other narrative details to design *Clones* and *Empire* as interlocking pieces of the larger ring structure.

As we make our way towards the end of *Clones*, there's another thing certainly worth noting about the collective shadow: The encounter with the collective shadow (Jango Fett) ultimately ends in the same way as both Anakin and Luke's encounter with the personal shadow.

During the battle in the Geonosis arena, Jedi-turned-soldier Mace Windu—who remarked at the start of the film that Jedi are "keepers of the peace, not soldiers," and also wrongly believed that

since Dooku was once a Jedi it wasn't in his "character" to assassinate anyone—charges aggressively at Jango Fett and lobs his head off. So, like the Sand People at the Tusken Camp and the illusion of Vader in the cave, Jango Fett is decapitated. But symbolically, like Anakin and Luke, Mace—representing the Jedi and the greater Republic—is the one who's "lost his head." [37] The Republic is as oblivious to the external threats it faces as it is to the unrecognized evil within.

Then, a young, sorrowful Boba Fett—appropriately bathed in shadow—kneels down and picks up his father's severed head. Like the personal aspects of the shadow illustrated by Luke and Anakin, when the collective aspects erupt into the world, in the form of war, annihilation, and destruction, they will sow the seeds of conflict for generations to come.

Lastly, color symbolism—which plays an important part in every *Star Wars* film—connects *Clones* to *Empire* in a fairly notable way: Both films deliberately use the same color palette. In an interview with the "*Star Wars" Insider* magazine, *Clones* concept designer Ryan Church reveals that: "George wanted the first half of [*Clones*] to look 'blue' and the second half to look 'red.' Coruscant (at night) and Kamino were the blue planets, Tatooine was neutral warm, and Geonosis (where red light suffuses a landscape of cracked rock and eerie stone mounds that resemble melted bones) was always going to be red." [38]

And you may not have noticed, but *Empire*'s moody cinematography also moves from blue to red. Most of the scenes on the planet Hoth are awash in a bluish tint while many scenes on Cloud City include skies and clouds with a reddish-orange tint.

While few moviegoers may consciously notice it, Lucas's subtle use of color connects the films and at the same time reinforces the similar paths of Anakin and Luke and their potential for moral descent.

This brings us to the final matching pair of the ring composition: *Revenge of the Sith* & *A New Hope*.

Notes:

1. Scott Chernoff, "The Plot Thickens," "*Star Wars" Insider*, July/August 2002, 55-56.
2. Mark Cotta Vaz, George Lucas, and Jonathan Hales, *The Art of "Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones*," (New York: Del Rey, 2002), 190.

3. Leigh Brackett, Lawrence Kasdan, and George Lucas, *The Empire Strikes Back*, Original Movie Script, (Monterey Park, CA: O.S.P. Publishing, Inc., 1994), 109-110.
4. Steven A. Galipeau, *The Journey of Luke Skywalker: An Analysis of Modern Myth and Symbol*, (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), 102.
5. George Lucas, "Audio Commentary," *The Empire Strikes Back*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2004).
6. David Begor, "Defense of the Clones," *Bright Lights Film Journal*, November 2002. http://brightlightsfilm.com/38/clones1.php#.U9lUoVanGCs.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Brackett, Kasdan, and Lucas, *Empire*, 31.
10. Vaz, Lucas, and Hales, *Clones*, 218.
11. Jody Duncan, *Mythmaking: Behind the Scenes of "Attack of the Clones,"* (New York: Ballantine, 2002), 98.
12. Jody Duncan, "Love & War," *Cinefex*, July 2002, 89.
13. Brackett, Kasdan, and Lucas, *Empire*, 72-73.
14. Galipeau, *Journey*, 116-118.
15. George Lucas, "Audio Commentary," Disc 1, *Attack of the Clones*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2002).
16. Chernoff, "Plot Thickens," 58.
17. Ibid.
18. Lucas, "Audio Commentary," *Clones* DVD.
19. Both *Empire* and *Clones* abound with cave symbolism. In myth, caves are often a site of initiation or rebirth, and signal the journey of self-discovery.
20. Anne Lancashire, "Complex Design in *The Empire Strikes Back*," *Film Criticism* 5, no. 3 (March 1981): 40.
21. David Adams Leeming, Kathryn Wood Madden, and Stanton Marlan, *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, 2 vols, (New York: Springer, 2009), 836.
22. Appropriately enough, Luke describes Dagobah as "like something out of a dream."
23. Anne Lancashire, "*Attack of the Clones* and the Politics of *Star Wars*," *The Dalhousie Review* 82, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 40.
24. Andrew Blackman, "'The Undiscovered Self' by Carl Jung," *Andrew Blackman, a writer's life* (blog), http://andrewblackman.net/2008/02/the-undiscovered-self-by-carl-jung/.
25. C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung Volume 9 (Part 1): The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, edited and translated by Gerhard Adler & R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), eBook edition, 18. Interestingly, both forests and water also symbolize the "feminine principle" or Great Mother. Perhaps this is why both Dagobah and Kamino are noticeably without sunlight, as the sun is associated with the "male principle."
26. Vaz, Lucas, and Hales, *Clones*, 72.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 70.
29. C.G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self: With Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams*, translated and revised by R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), eBook edition, 28.
30. Ibid., 69-70.

31. C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung Volume 18: The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous Writings*, edited and translated by Gerhard Adler & R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014) eBook edition, 590.
32. Duncan, *Mythmaking*, 136.
33. Lancashire, "*Attack of the Clones*," 241.
34. Richard Corliss and Jess Cagle, "Dark Victory," *Time*, April 29, 2002, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1002323,00.html.
35. Also, both Anakin and Luke, then, impatiently rush off on a rescue mission that goes awry, resulting in the rescuers needing to be rescued.
36. Lucas, "Audio Commentary," *Empire* DVD.
37. Galipeau, *Journey of Luke Skywalker*, 126.
38. Wallace, "War Factories," 24.

Part IV. Parallel Sections: *Revenge of the Sith* & *A New Hope*

In the dizzying opening shot of *Revenge of the Sith*, Lucas's swansong to his galaxy far far away, the camera follows two Jedi starfighters, piloted by Anakin and Obi-Wan, as they zoom across the surface of a massively long Republic Assault ship and plummet over its side into the chaotic battle below.

As a militaristic rendition of the "Force Theme" plays on the soundtrack, Anakin and Obi-Wan dodge enemy fire and, at Lucas's request, "fly in perfect harmony to express their friendship." [1] It's a breathtaking opener that recalls the visual storytelling prowess of the opening shot of *A New Hope* 28 years earlier (And at 76 seconds, it's the longest shot of any *Star Wars* film).

But when it's read in terms of the ring structure, another rich layer of complexity is revealed, along with the full extent of Lucas's visual ingenuity. Because like *Clones, Sith* begins at the end of its corresponding episode. So, if you can believe it, the continuous shot that opens *Sith* is actually a wildly imaginative reinterpretation of the final scene in *A New Hope*, where, following the destruction of the Death Star, newfound friends Luke and Han march *in unison* up a very long aisle in a throne room medal ceremony—with a military-style "Force Theme" soaring in the background.

As the final film in Lucas's *Star Wars* saga, *Sith* bridges the gap between the original trilogy and prequel trilogy. In terms of the ring composition, however, it's the last piece of the puzzle.

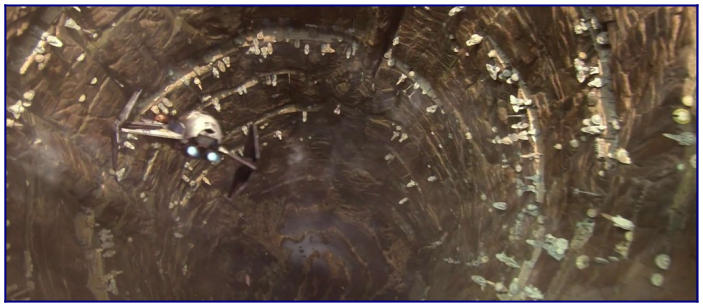
First, much of *Sith* is based on *Return of the Jedi*, the third film in the original trilogy, just as *Menace* is based on the first film of the original trilogy and *Clones* is based on the second. (In fact, the title of *Revenge of the Sith* is a reference to an early working title of *Jedi*, *Revenge of the Jedi*).

But as part of the ABC C'B'A' ring pattern, *Sith* corresponds instead to *A New Hope*. And, like the inverted relationship we saw between *Clones* and *Empire*, *Sith* and *A New Hope* correspond in a way that makes them appear as kind of mirror opposites. Let's compare:

	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III
REVENGE OF THE SITH	A space battle between Republic and Separatist forces rages over Coruscant. Anakin and Obi-Wan enter General Grevious's ship and rescue the captive Chancellor Palpatine. Grevious escapes to the hidden Separatist base.	There is a great disturbance in the Force when Anakin turns to the dark side and Palpatine executes Order 66. Obi-Wan and Yoda come across slaughtered younglings, which leads to a terrible discovery.	A fateful encounter takes place between Obi-Wan and a Skywalker. Obi-Wan and Luke travel to Tatooine.
A NEW HOPE	A fateful encounter takes place between Obi-Wan and a Skywalker. Obi-Wan and Luke come across slaughtered Jawas, which leads to a terrible discovery. Obi-Wan and Luke leave Tatooine.	There is a great disturbance in the Force when the Death Star destroys Alderaan. Luke, Han, and Obi-Wan enter the Death Star and rescue the captive Princess Leia. They escape to the hidden Rebel base.	A space battle between Imperial and Rebel forces rages over the Death Star.

The similarities are once again quite striking, with plot elements from the beginning of *A New Hope* occurring at the end of *Sith* and plot elements from the end of *A New Hope* occurring at the beginning of *Sith*. Some of the elements have shifted between acts and been condensed, but the basic pattern remains the same.

Sith, then, continues the descent that began in *Clones*. And as we move towards the center of the ring (also the ring's nadir) the imagery in *Sith*, like that in *Clones*, reflects Anakin's slow, gradual fall to the dark side—moving from the upper regions of Coruscant's atmosphere to the sinkhole planet of Utapau to finally, the hellish landscape of Mustafar.



The Beginning and the End

Like *Clones* and *Empire*, when *Sith* is read from this point of view, the connections between the start of the film and the end of *A New Hope* become increasingly visible.

After the reimagining of the throne room finale seen above, *Sith* plunges viewers into a hectic space battle followed by a daring rescue mission to free Chancellor Palpatine aboard Grievous's flagship, the Invisible Hand. Even though it takes up the first 25 minutes or so of the film, it actually corresponds with the last half (roughly an hour) of *A New Hope*, echoing first the attack on the Death Star and then the rescue of Princess Leia. Let's look at some examples:

The first line in the film, spoken by Anakin, is "Lock on to 'em R2." This subtly reflects the climactic moment in *A New Hope* when Luke, finally willing to "let go," turns off his targeting computer and trusts in the Force before taking the final shot. As *The Making of "Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith"* notes, the line is intended to illustrate "how Anakin relies heavily on droids and computers to target the enemy (the opposite of his son, who will use the Force)." [2] (Admittedly,

this was more overt in the film's screenplay where Anakin says "Lock on to 'em R2," multiple times and at one point even flies his starfighter into a trench, recalling the famous Death Star "trench run" from *A New Hope*.)

From a shot inside Anakin's cockpit, we see that "General Greivous's ship is dead ahead," recalling a similar shot in *A New Hope* from inside Vader's TIE Fighter, when Vader has Luke directly in his sights.

In *Sith*, a clone pilot gives the command, "Set S-foils in attack position." In *A New Hope*, after the X-Wing pilots report in, Red Leader orders, "Lock S-foils in attack position." [3] (Also, Anakin and Obi-Wan's ships are precursors to the Imperial TIE Fighter while the clones' ships are precursors to the Rebel X-Wing, the two iconic vehicles used in the attack on the first Death Star.)

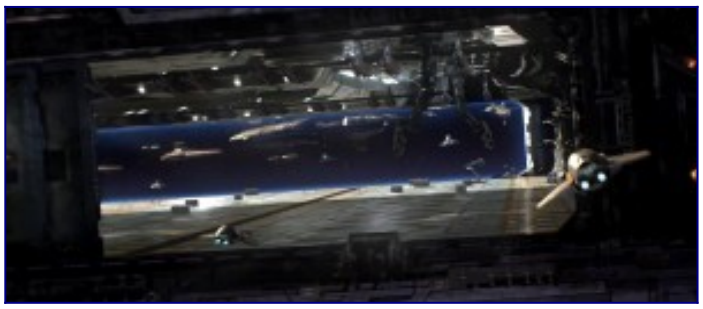
In *Sith*, Obi-Wan, whose ship is attacked by buzz droids, tells Anakin to “Get out of here. There’s nothing more you can do.” And during the attack on the Death Star, Luke tells the pilot Wedge, whose X-Wing is hit, to “Get clear. You can’t do any more good back there!”

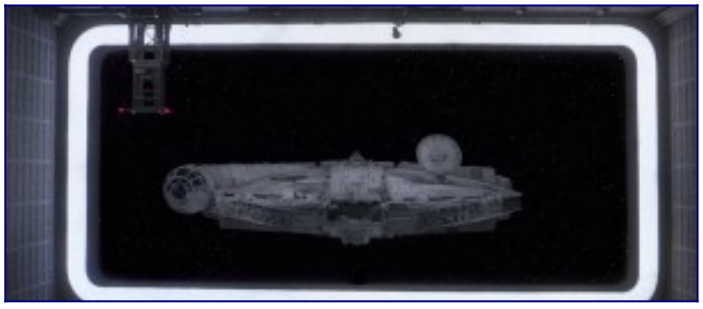
Other lines of dialogue from *A New Hope* are twisted even more inconspicuously in *Sith*. For instance, “Switch all power to front deflector screens” becomes “Surge all power units, Artoo.” And “I can’t shake ‘em,” which is said twice, turns into “They’re all over me,” also said twice.

As Luke’s X-Wing streaks through the Death Star trench, R2D2 extends a repair arm to fix a “stabilizer that’s broken loose again.” And after a buzz droid crawls onto the wing of Anakin’s ship, R2 extends an arm to fend off the attack.

In *A New Hope*, Leia watches the attack on the Death Star from the Rebel command center, a darkly lit setting with green neon light emanating from various computer displays and glass walls. The same green neon light also appears prominently on the bridge of Grevious’s ship, which functions as the Separatist command center during the opening battle.

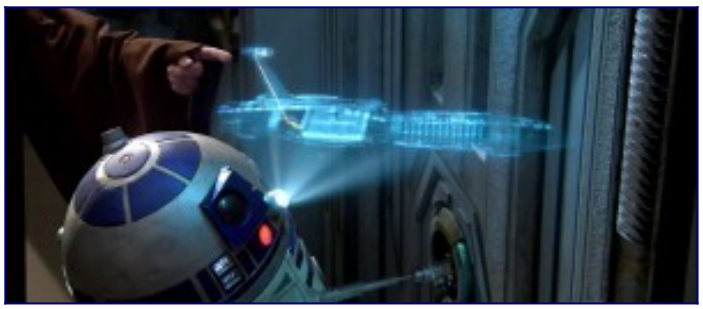
The opening space battle in *Sith* moves at breakneck speed, and only lasts about five minutes. Before we can even catch our breath, Obi–Wan exclaims “I’ve got a bad feeling about this” and his ship careens into the open hanger of Grevious’s ship with Anakin not far behind. At this point, six films into the series, it’s tempting to read the line as just a stale nod to tradition. But, like in the beginning of *Menace*, it’s actually being used to signal the ring structure. Because in *A New Hope*, Luke utters the well-known phrase for the first time when the Millennium Falcon is caught by the Death Star’s tractor beam—and pulled into an open hanger.





From this point, *Sith* begins to correspond to the scenes that take place when Luke and company are aboard the Death Star in *A New Hope*.

After a brief skirmish in the hangar in *Sith*, Obi-Wan orders R2 to plug into the ship’s computers and locate the Chancellor. After a brief skirmish in the Death Star command office in *A New Hope*, Obi-Wan orders R2 to plug into the battle station’s computer—at which point the little droid finds out where to deactivate the tractor beam and that Princess Leia is being held on board in the detention block. (In both films, the droids are left to wait behind while the rescue mission is undertaken.)



Before the Jedi head off to rescue Palpatine, Anakin looks around the hangar and says, “I sense Count Dooku,” echoing the moment in *A New Hope* when Vader stands in the Death Star hangar bay and says, “I sense something—a presence I’ve not felt since …”

Moments later in *Sith*, R2 finds himself hiding from two battle droids who’ve entered the hangar to search the Jedi starfighters. One of the droids overhears Obi-Wan’s voice over R2’s comlink and asks, “What that?” The second droid responds, “Get back to work. That nothing.”

This situation is meant to recall the scene in *A New Hope* where Obi-Wan powers down the Death Star’s tractor beam. To avoid detection from two stormtroopers, Obi-Wan uses the force to make them think they hear something down the hallway. “What was that?” the first trooper asks. “Oh, it’s nothing,” the second trooper replies.

Aboard the Invisible Hand, the Jedi use an elevator to reach the Chancellor. While deflecting laserfire with their lightsabers, they back into the elevator—unaware of the battle droids standing right behind them. Aboard the Death Star, Luke, Han, and Chewie use an elevator to reach the Princess. When the elevator arrives at the detention block, Luke and Han step forward to exit, but to their surprise the door actually opens up behind them.

Anakin and Luke both use a grappling hook to swing to safety over “bottomless pits.”

When the Invisible Hand takes heavy damage and goes into a nose dive, R2 slides and falls into a heap of broken battle droid parts. Moments later, R2's periscope pops out of the junk pile and looks around—a very clever allusion to the trash compactor monster that pokes its periscope-like eye out of the sludge and looks around.

After Anakin and Obi-Wan rescue Palpatine, they're captured and brought before General Grievous in a scene that corresponds to the detention block rescue scene in *A New Hope*.

"That wasn't much of a rescue," scoffs Grievous, in a line that clearly evokes "This is some rescue!"—Leia's sarcastic complaint to her supposed "rescuers" after they become trapped. And Anakin tells General Grievous, "You're shorter than I expected," which echoes Leia's famous line, "Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?"

Both scenes erupt into fighting (with alarms sounding) after the "prisoners" create a distraction: In *Sith*, R2 extends all of his arms and shoots out electrical pulses while in *A New Hope* a handcuffed Chewbacca "gets loose."

Both scenes also end on a similar note: Grievous escapes by breaking the ship's window with his staff and getting sucked out into space whereas Luke and the gang escape when Leia blasts a hole through a grate into a garbage chute.

Lastly, Grievious's escape to the secret Separatist base on the planet Utapau is a major plot point in *Sith*. The next part of the film involves the Republic finding Grievious and the Separatist base and launching a final attack. If this sounds familiar, it should, because it corresponds to the Millennium Falcon's escape from the Death Star and subsequent retreat to the hidden Rebel base in *A New Hope*. Of course, the next part of that film involves the Empire at long last tracking down the location of the Rebels and launching a final attack.

The End and the Beginning

As you might expect at this point, if we continue to read *Sith* from the perspective of the ring composition, the end of the film references the beginning of *A New Hope*.

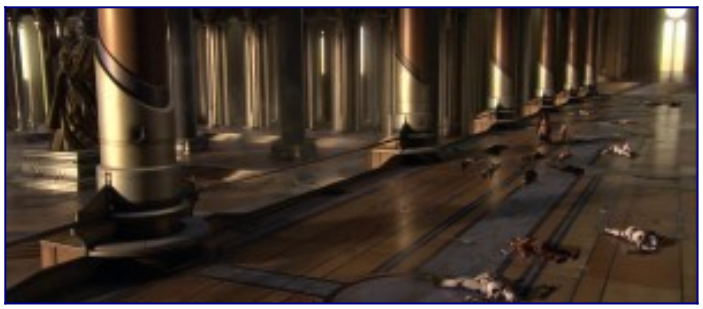
For example, transporting Yoda and Obi-Wan back to Coruscant, Senator Bail Organa receives a message from the Chancellor's office requesting his presence for a special session of Congress. "It could be a trap," Organa says to the Jedi. Obi-Wan doesn't think so. "The Chancellor will not be able to control the thousands of star systems without keeping the Senate intact." This line links directly to dialogue between Governor Tarkin and one of his generals during *A New Hope*'s Death Star conference room scene:

> **TARKIN:** The Imperial Senate will no longer be of any concern to us. I've just received word that the Emperor has dissolved the council permanently. The last remnants of the Old Republic have been swept away.
> **TAGGE:** That's impossible! How will the Emperor maintain control without the bureaucracy?
> **TARKIN:** The regional governors now have direct control over territories. Fear will keep the local systems in line. Fear of this battle station. [4]

Also, you may not have noticed, but Yoda and Obi-Wan hitching a ride with Bail Organa to Coruscant actually corresponds to Han Solo transporting Luke and Obi-Wan off Tatooine.

More significantly, though, on their way to Anchorhead in *A New Hope*, Luke, Obi-Wan and the droids stumble across a burned-out sandcrawler surrounded by dead Jawas. Luke suspects that the Sandpeople did it. "They didn't," says Obi-Wan. "But we are meant to think they did. These tracks are side by side. Sandpeople always ride single file to hide their numbers … And these blast points, too accurate for Sandpeople. Only Imperial stormtroopers are so precise." Confused, Luke asks, "But why would Imperial troops want to slaughter Jawas?" Luke glances at the droids when the answer dawns on him. He jumps in his landspeeder and races home only to the find the smoking ruins of the moisture farm and the charred skeletons of his aunt and uncle. With nothing left to hold him back, Luke resolves to join Obi-Wan and become a Jedi.

After Yoda and Obi-Wan survive "Order 66" in *Revenge of the Sith*, they infiltrate the Jedi temple to reprogram a message and warn any remaining Jedi to stay away instead of returning. And in a scene clearly meant to evoke the one at the attacked sandcrawler, Yoda and Obi-Wan walk through the temple ruins and come upon the dead bodies of Jedi children.



Both scenes contain bodies strewn across the ground with smoke still hanging in the air. Also, notice the reverse diagonal compositions in the shots above. A brief exchange of dialogue further strengthens the connection between the two scenes:

> **OBI-WAN:** Not even the younglings survived.
> **YODA:** Killed not by clones, this Padawan. By a lightsaber, he was.
> **OBI-WAN:** Who? Who could have done this? [5]

Similar to Luke's question about why Imperial troops would want to slaughter Jawas, Obi-Wan's question will lead to a terrible discovery. A review of surveillance recordings reveals that it was Anakin who killed the young Jedi students. Anakin Skywalker, like Luke's Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru, is no more. "Twisted by the dark side, young Skywalker has become," Yoda tells Obi-Wan. "The boy you trained, gone he is . . . consumed by Darth Vader." Although reluctant, Obi-Wan agrees to face his former apprentice.

When Padme learns about Anakin from Obi-Wan, she flies to the lava-soaked planet of Mustafar to confront her husband, who's traveled there because the Chancellor gave him a "very important mission." She's accompanied by C3PO, who pilots the skiff.

Eagle-eyed viewers may recall that C3PO is driving Luke's landspeeder when the two set out across the desert to search for R2 in *A New Hope*. And similar to Anakin, R2 is on a "secret mission" (to deliver Leia's message to Obi-Wan).

On Mustafar, Anakin uses the force to choke Padme nearly to death until Obi-Wan stops him, yelling "Let her go!" Likewise, in *A New Hope* Vader force chokes Admiral Motti to the brink of death until Tarkin commands, "Enough of this! Vader, release him."

Early in *A New Hope*, Vader physically lifts the captain of the Rebel Blockade Runner off the ground (with his left hand) and chokes him to death. During the duel on Mustafar, Anakin grabs Obi-Wan by the throat (with his right hand) and forces him *down* on a table.

Both the last act of *Sith* and the first act of *A New Hope* center around the destiny-defining encounter between a Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. But *Sith* puts a twist on this "Supernatural Aid/Meeting with the Mentor" stage of Joseph Campbell's "Monomyth," or Hero's Journey.

When Luke is attacked by Sandpeople on Tatooine, Obi-Wan comes to his rescue. Similarly, when Anakin is left for dead on Mustafar, Palpatine—Anakin's new, *dark mentor*—comes to his rescue and saves his life. Palpatine, like Obi-Wan, kneels down and places his hand on Skywalker's forehead.

Shortly thereafter, the newly christened Darth Vader—encased in the iconic black armored life-support suit—rises from an operating table in a dark, smoke-filled scene straight out of Universal's *Frankenstein* films. This "first appearance" of Darth Vader at the conclusion of the prequels nicely reflects his dramatic entrance into the smoky, brightly lit white corridor of the Rebel Blockade Runner at the beginning of *A New Hope*.

In addition, the first time Vader speaks in both films, he asks a series of three questions. In *A New Hope*:

> *Vader squeezes the neck of the Rebel Officer, who struggles in vain.*
> **VADER:** Where are those transmissions you intercepted?
> *Vader lifts the Rebel off his feet by his throat.*
> **VADER:** What have you done with those plans?
> **REBEL OFFICER:** We intercepted no transmissions. Aaah … This is a consular ship. We're on a diplomatic mission.
> **VADER:** If this is a consular ship … where is the Ambassador? [6]

In *Sith*:

> **DARTH SIDIOUS**: Lord Vader, can you hear me?
> **VADER:** Yes, My Master.
> *DARTH VADER looks around the room.*
> **VADER:** (continuing) Where is Padme? Is she safe, is she all right? [7]

The first line spoken in *A New Hope* is "Did you hear that?" by C3PO, in a quick exchange with R2 on the fleeing blockade runner at the start of the film. Given the circular structure of the saga, it's only appropriate then that C3PO utters the last line in *Sith*, "Oh no!"—in a short conversation with R2 aboard a space cruiser that looks nearly identical to the Rebel ship.

As you can see, the relationship between *Sith* and *A New Hope* is the same as the one between *Clones* and *Empire*: elements towards the start of *Sith* correspond to those at the end of *A New Hope*, and elements at the end of *Sith* correspond to those at the start of *A New Hope*. Importantly, this pattern continues the sense of descent towards the center of the ring.

Beginnings, Middles, and Ends

Just as in the previous pairs, progressing through *Sith* uncovers corresponding elements to *A New Hope* that run parallel, with elements once again being imaginatively reinterpreted.

For instance, earlier we saw that the opening of *Sith* was an inventive reimagining of *A New Hope*'s final scene. But it's also a subtle inversion of the opening of *A New Hope*. After the camera pans down in *A New Hope*, a seemingly endless Imperial Star Destroyer flies over a stationary camera.

The pan down in *Sith*, instead, reveals that the camera is *high above* a Republic Star Destroyer, looking straight down at it. The camera then *moves*, tracking the Jedi starfighters as they fly overtop the equally endless capital ship.

General Grievous, a cyborg with breathing difficulty that foreshadows Anakin's transformation into Darth Vader, first appears on screen entering the bridge of his ship—through a door, followed by two bodyguards. This echoes the first appearance of Darth Vader, striding through the doorway of the blockade runner, flanked by two stormtroopers.

Like *A New Hope*, the first part of *Sith* focuses primarily on two characters. In the first part of *Episode IV*, the story is told mainly from the point of view of C3PO and R2D2 (a device used by Akira Kurosawa in *The Hidden Fortress* with two bickering peasants). The two lowly droids flee the Rebel Blockade Runner in an escape pod that crashes down in the dunes of the Tatooine desert. In the first part of the *Episode III*, the story focuses primarily on Anakin and Obi-Wan, who are forced to crash-land the Invisible Hand after Grievious flees the ship in an escape pod and jettisons all the remaining pods.

When cleaning R2, Luke accidentally stumbles across a hologram of Princess Leia pleading for help, a vital message that draws Luke into a quest to rescue her. In *Sith*, Lucas reinvents this crucial plot point, rather brilliantly, as Anakin's nightmare about Padme dying in childbirth.

Much like Leia's holographic message, the vision of Padme will draw Anakin into a life-saving quest. And if you listen carefully during Anakin's first nightmare, Padme cries, "Anakin, help me," which, of course, echoes Leia's "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope." In addition, the holographic message is played twice in *A New Hope*, the second time with Obi-Wan in his hut. In *Sith*, we witness two of Anakin's nightmares, with Obi-Wan appearing in the second one.

The scene with Luke and Obi-Wan inside the Jedi Master's hut takes place around the 35-minute mark. When Luke asks how his father died, Obi-Wan tells him: "A young Jedi named Darth Vader, who was a pupil of mine until he turned to evil, helped the Empire hunt down and destroy the Jedi Knights. He betrayed and murdered your father. Now the Jedi are all but extinct. Vader was seduced by the dark side of the Force." [8]

At the same time in *Sith*, Anakin and Yoda sit inside "Yoda's Quarters" in the Jedi Temple and discuss Anakin's premonitions. The dialogue not only parallels but also expands on Obi-Wan's answer to Luke—enhancing our understanding of Anakin's eventual "seduction" by the dark side and making explicit the emotional issues at the heart of the saga:

> **YODA:** Careful you must be when sensing the future, Anakin. The fear of loss is a path to the dark side.
> **ANAKIN:** I won't let these visions come true, Master Yoda.
> **YODA:** Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them, do not. Miss them, do not. Attachment leads to jealousy. The shadow of greed, that is.
> **ANAKIN:** What must I do, Master Yoda?
> **YODA:** Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose. [9]

Greed, of course, is the main driving force behind Anakin's turn to the dark side. He becomes Darth Vader "because he gets attached to things," says Lucas. "He can't let go of his mother … his girlfriend … things. It makes you greedy. And when you're greedy, you are on the path to the dark side because you fear that you're going to lose things. You fear you're not going to have the power you need." [10]

After Obi-Wan watches Leia's message in *A New Hope*, he tells Luke that he must learn the ways of the Force and come with him to the planet Alderaan. When Luke refuses, Obi-Wan says, "I need your help, Luke. She needs your help. I'm getting too old for this sort of thing."

Shortly after the scene between Anakin and Yoda in *Sith*, Palpatine—a father figure to Anakin just as Obi-Wan is a father figure to Luke—also asks for Anakin's assistance:

> **PALPATINE:** I need your help, son.
> **ANAKIN:** What do you mean?
> **PALPATINE:** I'm depending on you.
> **ANAKIN:** For what? I don't understand.
> **PALPATINE:** To be the eyes, ears, and voice of the Republic. Anakin, I'm appointing you to be my personal representative on the Jedi Council. [11]

In the Mos Eisley spaceport, Luke and Obi-Wan walk to the docking bay to leave for Alderaan when a long-snouted alien spots them and quietly alerts Imperial Stormtroopers to the location of the heroes (Rebels). On the planet Utapau, Obi-Wan arrives looking for Grievous when a tall, lanky alien secretly gives him the location of the villains (Separatists).

Minutes later, both films cut to an establishing shot of a spherical-shaped base, then to a villainous leader, standing with his back to the camera and his hand(s) behind his back.

In the ensuing scene on the Death Star, Tarkin threatens to destroy Alderaan unless Leia reveals the location of the Rebels' hidden base. A defiant Leia says, "The more you tighten your grip, Tarkin, the more star systems will slip through your fingers." In the scene on Utapau, Grievous warns the Separatist leaders that the Republic will soon discover their secret base so they must go to Mustafar where they'll be safe. Two lines of dialogue echo Leia's line:

> **NUTE GUNRAY:** Safe? Chancellor Palpatine managed to escape your grip, General, without Count Dooku. I have doubts about your ability to keep us safe.
> **GENERAL GRIEVOUS:** Be thankful, Viceroy, you have not found yourself in *my grip.* [12]

Aboard the Millennium Falcon, Luke trains with his lightsaber and receives his first "mind-expanding" lesson in the power of the Force. He wears a helmet that covers his eyes (which can "deceive you," remarks Obi-Wan) and successfully deflects lasers from a hovering remote. Obi-Wan congratulates him: "You've taken your first step into a larger world."

When Palpatine reveals his identity as the mysterious Darth Sidious to Anakin (who's been blind to the truth), he advises Skywalker to broaden his horizons, so to speak: "Anakin, if one is to understand the great mystery, one must study all its aspects, not just the dogmatic, narrow view of

the Jedi. If you wish to become a complete and wise leader, you must embrace a *larger* view of the Force." [13]

On the Death Star, Luke comes up with the idea to pose as Stormtroopers escorting a prisoner to the detention block. Luke takes metal binders and tries to place Chewbacca "under arrest" but the wookiee objects and growls loudly. Occurring simultaneously in *Sith*, Mace Windu and three other Jedi attempt to arrest Palpatine. The Chancellor, like Chewbacca, also objects and screams (as he spins through the air with a lightsaber.) Both scenes even contain the same number of characters: five.

Halfway through *A New Hope*, the planet Alderaan is destroyed. Inside the Millenium Falcon, Obi-Wan suddenly appears distraught. He places his hand over his chest and sits down. "I felt a great disturbance in the Force," he tells Luke. "As if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror, and were suddenly silenced." Then, he puts his hand on his forehead, as if in pain.

Halfway through *Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin turns to the dark side. He kneels before his new master Darth Sidious and is anointed Darth Vader. Then, for a brief moment, the scene cuts away to

Yoda, who is visibly shaken. Shortly thereafter, during the “Order 66” montage that highlights the extermination of the Jedi, Yoda echoes the exact gestures of Obi-Wan—connecting Anakin’s turn and the murder of the Jedi to the mass murder on Alderaan.

The walls of the trash compactor begin to close in on Luke, Leia, Han, and Chewie around 80 minutes into *A New Hope.* At the same time in *Sith*, the walls close in on the Jedi when Order 66 is commenced. (It’s probably no accident either that we see four Jedi die onscreen in *Sith*, the same number of characters we *almos*t see die in the trash compactor in *A New Hope*.)

Also of note is that both films include a character going under water at this point. Luke gets pulled under the murky waters of the trash compactor by the one-eyed monster and Obi-Wan falls hundreds of feet into a sinkhole filled with clear blue-green water.

Obi-Wan sneaks around the Death Star to disable the tractor beam around 85 minutes into *A New Hope*. And sure enough, 85 minutes into *Sith*, we see Obi-Wan sneaking around Utapau, trying to reach a starfighter on a secret landing platform. Notice how Lucas creates a subtle visual link between the two scenes. In both of the shots below, Obi-Wan tries to avoid detection from "troopers." Both shots appear "flattened," with an object essentially splitting the frame into two at an angle—with characters on both sides. In *Sith*, Obi-Wan (on the right side of the frame) hides from clonetroopers (left side). In *A New Hope*, it's reversed.

Finally, in *A New Hope* the Empire allows Princess Leia and her friends to escape the Death Star after planting a homing beacon on the Millennium Falcon, thus revealing the location of the hidden Rebel base. The final battle ensues shortly thereafter.

Towards the end of *Sith*, Obi-Wan visits Padme and reveals to her the truth about Anakin and asks about his whereabouts. She lies and says she doesn't know. Obi-Wan leaves, knowing that Padme will immediately go to Anakin. And like the tracking device onboard the Falcon, Obi-Wan secretly stows away on her ship—and confronts his former pupil in the film's final battle.

Notes:

1. J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of "Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith,"* (New York: Del Rey Books, 2005), 160.
2. Ibid., 167.
3. While the line is also spoken in *Jedi* during the attack on the second Death Star, the reverse angles between shots suggest a deliberate link between *Sith* and *A New Hope*.
4. George Lucas, *Star Wars*, Original Movie Script, (Monterey Park, CA.: O.S.P. Publishing, Inc., 1994), 45.
5. George Lucas, *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*, Screenplay, (The Internet Movie Script Database), http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Star-Wars-Revenge-of-the-Sith.html.
6. Lucas, *Star Wars*, 5.
7. Lucas, *Sith*.
8. Lucas, *Star Wars*, 42.
9. Lucas, *Sith*.
10. Richard Corliss and Jess Cagle, "Dark Victory," *Time*, April 29, 2002, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1002323,00.html.
11. Lucas, *Sith*.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.

Part V: Rings Within Rings

Before we move on to closing the ring, I want to briefly discuss another requirement of ring composition: rings within rings. If you'll recall from the seven rules of ring structures, "Some rings emphasize the division into two halves by making each half a ring."

And this is exactly what the *Star Wars* ring composition does.

Adding yet another layer of complexity to an already intricate structure, each trilogy—or half of the composition—is itself a smaller ring within the larger outer ring. However, they're not exactly like the kind of rings we've discussed so far. Rather, the third film in each trilogy repeats and varies elements from the previous two films to create, among other things, a sense of coming full circle, both structurally and thematically. Let's look at a few quick examples:

Return of the Jedi, for instance, starts by deliberately mirroring the opening shot of *A New Hope*, as an Imperial Star Destroyer flies over the camera with a planet below.

Like *A New Hope*, *Jedi* begins on Tatooine. The first part of the film focuses primarily on C3PO and R2D2, the same two "lowly characters" we followed at the start of *A New Hope*. And the droids are once again on a mission to deliver a holographic message.

However, the third film in the original trilogy is far from being a simple retread of the first film's plotline. As Anne Lancashire explains in her 1983 essay on *Jedi*, "Once More With Feeling," the end of the film "structurally sums up all the previous *Star Wars* battles: aerial dogfights over a Death Star as in *A New Hope* (and including the Falcon against Star Destroyers, as in *Empire*); a land battle involving a power generator and Imperial Walkers, as in *Empire*, and a duel between Luke and Darth Vader, as in *Empire*." [1]

Turning to the prequels, *Sith*'s first act plays out in remarkably similar fashion to *Menace*'s: two "significant characters" (again, a Jedi Master and Apprentice) board a large spacecraft orbiting a planet and rescue a captured political figure. Small details correspond as well. For instance, notice how "destroyer droids" attack the Jedi near the start of both films.

But rather than structurally sum up the battles of the first and second films, the end of *Sith* represents a regression of sorts. If you recall, the end of *Menace* features a space battle, ground battle, and lightsaber duel taking place simultaneously. The end of *Clones* features both a ground battle and lightsaber duel. The end of *Sith*, therefore, features only a lightsaber duel.

Like *Menace*, the elaborate end duel in *Sith* climaxes with Obi-Wan cutting a "Sith Lord" to pieces. In *Menace*, Obi-Wan jumps out of a pit, over Darth Maul's head, and then slices him in half. Afterwards, Obi-Wan promises his dying mentor Qui-Gon that he'll train Anakin. With his final breath, Qui-Gon says that "He [Anakin] is the chosen one." In *Sith*, it's Anakin who tries to leap over Obi-Wan. But Obi-Wan sees it coming, and dismembers him. As his former apprentice lies dying, Obi-Wan yells, "You were the chosen one!"

Also of note: Darth Maul, with his horns and red and black visage (representing the "evil within us," [2] according to Lucas) actually prefigures the infernal landscape of Mustafar and Anakin's eventual fall from grace. Thus, late in *Sith*, we see Anakin with the same red and yellow eyes as Maul.

The end of *Sith* also returns to the capital city of Naboo with Padme's funeral procession, mirroring the victory celebration seen at the closing of *Menace*.

Both *Jedi* and *Sith* also bring each trilogy thematically full circle. Lancashire, who has written extensively about the cyclical nature of *Star Wars*, argues: "Each episode in *Jedi* repeats, with variations, one or more episodes from the previous two films, to show successes by the central characters replacing what we now clearly see to have been earlier failures under similar circumstances; and the successes are achieved through the understanding and control of the darker emotions (hatred, romantic sensuality, fear, and the like). [3]

Lancashire covers, among others, the Jabba's Palace sequence, "a more elaborate and horrifying, though still comic, replay of *A New Hope*'s cantina sequence," [4] and the duel between Luke and Vader on the second Death Star, a replay of their duel in *Empire*—two sequences that, through repetition and variation, demonstrate Luke's final growth to maturity.

Sith, on the other hand, repeats, with variations, scenarios from the previous two films to show continued *failures* of the central characters largely through the *inability* to understand and control

the darker emotions. For example, the second encounter between Anakin and Count Dooku (a vengeful Anakin beheads the helpless Count in cold blood) and more significantly, Anakin's fear of losing Padme, a darker replay of his fear of losing his mother.

Frankly, this topic is easily large enough for its own essay. But for the purposes of the ring composition, it should be evident that the third film in each trilogy is, in part, designed to be a return to the first film, giving the story a kind of circular quality.

Notes:

1. Anne Lancashire, "*Return of the Jedi*: Once More With Feeling," *Film Criticism* 8, no. 2 (January 1984): 60.
2. George Lucas, "Of Myth and Men," interview by Bill Moyers, *Time*, April 18, 1999: 90.
3. Lancashire, "*Jedi*," 57.
4. Ibid.

Part VI. Closing the Ring

Let's recap: According to the rules outlined in Mary Douglas's book, *Thinking in Circles*, a ring composition needs an introductory section, a split into two halves, parallel sections, indicators to mark individual sections, a mid-turn where the central meaning of the work is placed, rings within rings, and closure at two levels: structural and thematic.

And here's what we've learned so far: *The Phantom Menace* functions as an exposition or prologue. The six-film series is divided into two parallel halves: the prequel trilogy and the original trilogy. *Menace* corresponds to *Jedi*, *Clones* corresponds to *Empire*, and *Sith* corresponds to *A New Hope*, making the overall pattern ABC C'B'A'. In other words, after *Sith* the sequence stops, turns around, and reversing the order of the films, circles back to the beginning—making an inverted parallel with the first half. Lastly, we've learned that the larger ring structure includes two smaller rings.

That leaves a couple of rules left to tackle. First, let's go over closing the ring.

"The minimum criterion for a ring composition," Douglas writes, "is for the ending to join up with the beginning," and that structurally the "linking up of starting point and end creates an envelope that contains everything between the opening phrases and the conclusion." [1]

Based on the correspondences between *Menace* and *Jedi*, we now know that the films are inextricably related to each other and together frame the series with a beginning and end in parallel. However, we also know that of the three pairs of corresponding films, only *Menace* and *Jedi* are not "mirror opposites," so to speak. Why is that?

Well, it turns out that Lucas is using another ancient literary device, which often accompanies ring composition, to close the ring. The device is known as an "inclusion" (or the Latin *inclusio*). [2]

Essentially another form of parallelism, an inclusion is "the narrative device common in biblical texts in which a detail is repeated at the beginning and the end of a narrative unit in order to 'bracket off' the unit and give it a sense of closure and structural integrity." [3] So, *Menace* and *Jedi* form an inclusion that brackets off the six-film saga as a single, unified whole and brings us right back to where we started, thus closing the loop.

Inclusion also serves a thematic function. That's because the main theme is expressed at both the beginning and end of the story—allowing the author to basically introduce and conclude a main point. Everything in-between the "brackets," then, should be read in light of that theme.

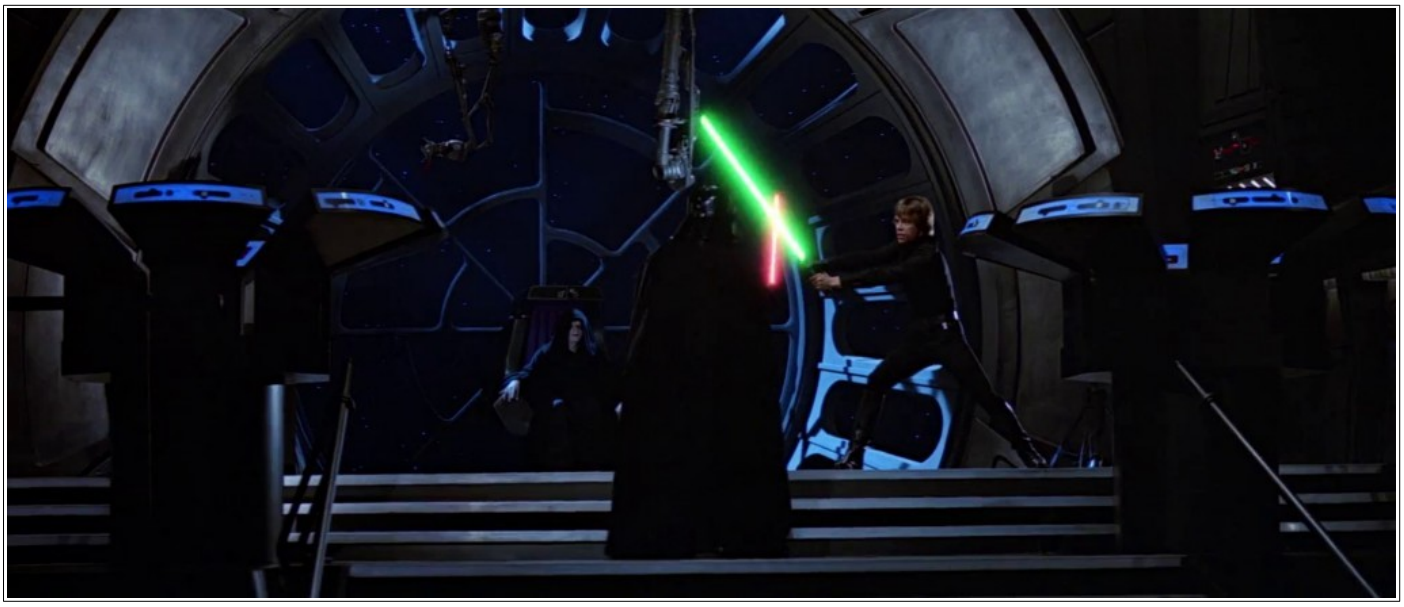
The thematic role of an inclusion is key because a ring composition has to close on more than just a structural level. Says Douglas: "Most importantly, there also has to be thematic correspondence … [the ending] brings matters to a close by distributing their just deserts to the characters or by reconciling them by fulfilling curses or promises, making prophecies come true, pointing out that the original mission has been accomplished or harmony restored." [4]

Of course, we learn in *Menace* that Qui-Gon detects a "vergence" [5] in the Force around Anakin and believes that he is the chosen one of an ancient Jedi prophecy, destined to destroy the Sith and bring balance to the Force.

But by the end of *Sith*, the prophecy certainly appears in doubt. As Anakin lay dying on Mustafar, Obi-Wan cries, "You were the chosen one! It was said that you would destroy the Sith, not join them. Bring balance to the force, not leave it in darkness."

Perhaps Yoda was right when he said, “A prophecy that misread might have been,” and Anakin is not the chosen one. Or maybe, the prophecy wouldn’t be fulfilled *how* or *when* the Jedi thought it would be.

As we all know, though, the end of *Sith* is not the end of Anakin. His journey ultimately merges with his son’s in a final confrontation before the Emperor at the climax of *Return of the Jedi*.



When Darth Vader senses Luke’s feelings for his sister and threatens to turn her to the dark side, Luke screams in anger and attacks Vader in a frenzy of hate, knocking the Dark Lord to his knees and cutting his hand off. The Emperor urges Luke to finish Vader.

Luke looks at his father’s mechanical hand, then to his own mechanical, black-gloved hand, and realizes how much he his becoming like his father—overrun by fear, anger, and hate. If he kills Vader, he’ll turn to the dark side and take Vader’s place at the Emperor’s side. But, as Obi-Wan told him, killing Vader is the only way to destroy the Empire.

Like any true hero, Luke chooses a different path—his own path—and it’s one of compassion. He takes a moment to calm himself then throws his lightsaber aside, standing down for good.

Enraged, the Emperor assaults Luke with deadly barrage of lightning bolts from his fingertips. As Luke writhes on the floor in unbearable pain, he *still* sees the good in his father and pleads for his help. Then, just before the Emperor delivers a lethal blast of lightning to kill Luke, Vader has an epiphany and finally sees the tragic error of his ways. He turns and picks up the Emperor and throws him down the Death Star’s reactor shaft.

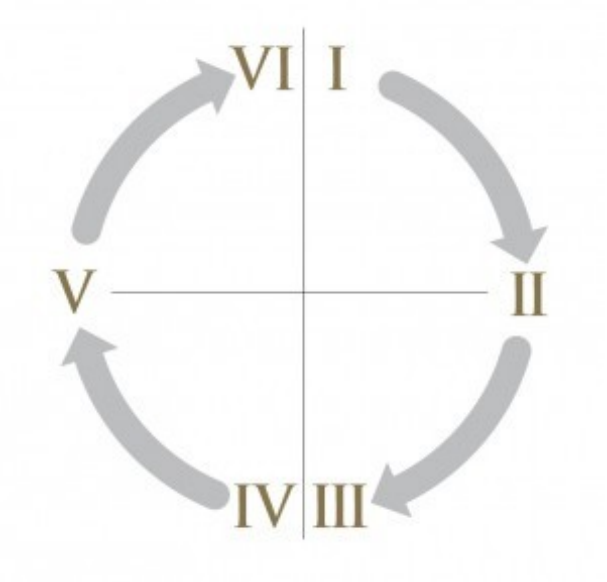
In the *The Making of “Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith,*” Lucas elaborates on this pivotal moment:

> Children teach you compassion. They teach you to love unconditionally. Anakin can’t be redeemed for all the pain and suffering he’s caused. He doesn’t right the wrongs, but he stops the horror. The end of the saga is simply Anakin saying, *I care about this person, regardless of what it means to me. I will throw away everything that I have, everything that I’ve grown to love—primarily the Emperor—and throw away my life, to save this person. And I’m doing it because he has faith in me; he loves me despite all the horrible things I’ve*

> *done. I broke his mother's heart, but he still cares about me, and I can't let that die.* Anakin is very different in the end. The thing of it is: the prophecy was right. Anakin was the chosen one, and he does bring balance to the Force. He takes the ounce of good still left in him and destroys the Emperor out of compassion for his son. [6]

Importantly, by returning to the saga's overriding theme of balance and fulfilling the prophecy, Lucas fulfills the requirements to close the ring on a thematic level. So, to borrow a line from Darth Vader in *A New Hope*, "The circle is now complete."

At this point, if we draw the ring composition as a circle, it might look something like this:



As we've seen, the circle consists of three pairs of corresponding films—or, from a certain point of view, three pairs of *opposites*. Two of the pairs (*Clones*/*Empire* and *Sith*/*A New Hope*) are designed as kind of mirror opposites, which helps create a sense of descending the circle to its lowest point before ascending it back to the beginning, in a kind of endless loop. And since the films in each pair are opposites, the trilogies themselves become opposites—all contained within a circle.

So, using practically every aspect of every frame of the six films, Lucas crafted a series of carefully arranged, "intricately corresponding parallelisms" that actually shape the structure of the saga like a circle, or ring. That in and of itself is a fairly amazing feat of cinematic storytelling. Equally impressive, though, is how form and content work together to deepen our understanding of the saga and help interpret the meaning at the center of the ring.

The Balancing of Opposites

To see how form and content work together to bring out the meaning of *Star Wars*, we'll do a little exercise. First, let's briefly consider the significance of the circle itself. Probably one of the oldest and most common symbols in human history, the circle can be found in virtually every culture and every era and carries extensive meaning. It often symbolizes, among other things, unity, wholeness, eternity (since it has no beginning and no end) and the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

In Jungian terms, "the circle is a symbol of the Self and indicates the end of the process of individuation, of striving towards a psychic wholeness and self-realization." [7] And, interestingly, Joseph Campbell's "Monomyth" or Hero's Journey is a path commonly represented by a circle (with its three main stages being Departure, Initiation and Return).

Next, let's look at something Lancashire points out in her essay on *Episode 1*. With its explicit emphasis on duality, she argues, *Menace* provides an "overarching metaphorical way" of reading the saga as a whole (which, by the way, was still unfinished at the time of her writing):

> Episodes 4 – 6 have already presented to audiences the return/redemption of the hero (humankind) through his developed potential to become a Jedi: (self-)knowledgeable, controlled, compassionate, and powerful through self-sacrifice. Episodes 1 – 3, repeating and varying 4 – 6, will apparently now show a contrasting mythic initiation failure/fall through the hero's developed potential to become a Sith: aggressive, self-centered, and powerful above all through anger, hatred, and human fear of death. Jedi and Sith, an integrated *Star Wars* reading of *Menace* indicates, are in significant part the manifestations of human duality: the ever-present, never-extinct, opposing moral possibilities within every human individual and state. Individual human lives (and political systems) are not predetermined by "destiny" but are defined and redefined by difficult and continually recurring moral choices, and all of *Star Wars* to date—an old-fashioned epic saga of morally significant heroes and monsters—can thus in part be read as a densely packed, visually exhilarating, and narratively absorbing metaphor for the never-ending conflict between the evil and the good within us all. [8]

Now, that's probably one of the best analyses of the *Star Wars* saga you'll find. But the bigger picture may just now be starting to unfold. Because if we put the symbol of the circle together with Lancashire's insight, an image—perhaps the defining image of the saga—begins to take shape: A perfect circle divided into two equal but opposite halves—one light and one dark—that are deeply interconnected and eternally interact with one another to form a whole greater than either separate part.

I'm referring, of course, to the classic Yin Yang symbol.

As many of you may already know, the ancient Daoist concept wonderfully illustrates the duality of all things in nature and the perfect balance between opposites. And what's really interesting is that Lucas has spoken in the past about a sort of dynamic interplay of opposites that exists in *Star Wars*. Here's what he told *The Los Angeles Times* in 2002:

> I wanted to have this mythological footing because I was basing the films on the idea that the Force has two sides, the good side, the evil side, and they both need to be there. Most religions are built on that, whether it's called Yin and Yang, God and the devil—everything is built on the push-pull tension created by two sides of the equation. Right from the very beginning, that was the key issue in *Star Wars*. [9]

And in 1999's *The Mythology of Star Wars* with Bill Moyers, Lucas touched on the idea of opposites when he spoke about the light and dark sides of the force:

> Those sides are designed around compassion and greed. The issue of greed, of getting things and owning things and having things and not being able to let go of things, is the opposite of compassion—of not thinking of yourself all the time. These are the two sides—the good force and the bad force. They're the simplest parts of a complex cosmic construction. [10]

Of course, there's also the overall thematic design of the trilogies themselves. "The two [trilogies] will beat against each other," Lucas says. "One's the fall, one's the redemption." [11]

Perhaps most revealing of all, though, is that Lucas even went so far as to include a blink-and-you'll-miss-it image of the Yin Yang in *Attack of the Clones*:

Not coincidentally, the symbol appears at the script's *midpoint* while Anakin meditates (and can you believe chapter 25/50 on the DVD and Blu-ray?).

Here's some quick background for those unfamiliar with the ancient symbol: Yin and Yang represent the two opposite principles (or opposing forces) in nature. Yin (from the ancient Chinese character for "shady side of a hill") is usually associated with qualities like darkness, female energy, the moon, descending, and the negative aspects in nature, among other things. Yang (from the character for "sunny side of a hill") is usually associated with light, male energy, the sun, ascending, and the positive aspects in nature. The two forces are always interacting and always in flux.

Although Yin and Yang are opposites, they are, paradoxically, complementary. One cannot exist without the other, thus the two are interdependent. For example, light cannot exist without darkness and vice versa.

And since each half also contains a bit of its opposite or the essence of the other—represented by the small black circle within the white swirl, and a small white circle within the black swirl—the universe and everything in it is interconnected and there are no absolutes.

So, if we now look at the saga through the lens of this simple, yet powerful symbol, each trilogy becomes one half of the Yin Yang. The prequel trilogy represents Yin. The original trilogy represents Yang. And like the Yin Yang, these two seemingly opposing forces or trilogies (and the pairs of corresponding films between them) are actually complementary, interdependent opposites. Neither one can exist without the other.

As we saw earlier, the films, like the Yin Yang, are deeply interconnected through almost every aspect of moviemaking. In a way, then, the trilogies interact with each other to form a "symbiont circle," as Obi-Wan says in *Menace*. What happens to one affects the other with the whole being far greater than the sum of its parts. [12]

In addition, at the heart of each trilogy, there is the seed of its opposite, a quality that's powerfully embodied by the father-son relationship of Anakin and Luke. Author Mary Henderson made this very point in *The Magic of Myth*, the companion book to the *Star Wars* exhibit at the Smithsonian: "One [Darth Vader] personifies evil but carries within him the potential for redemption, while the other [Luke] personifies good but carries within the potential for evil. Beyond the struggle between them lies hope of their reconciliation through atonement. Like the Chinese Yin and Yang, each contains a drop of the other." [13]

Also, like the Chinese symbol, the interaction between trilogies seeks to establish and maintain a dynamic balance "in order to achieve harmony in nature, the stability of a society, and a long rule with eternal peace, as well as the health of individuals." [14] So, whenever one force reaches its peak (at the end of *Sith*, for instance), it will naturally begin to transform into the opposite force. [15]

From this perspective, then, Anakin's heroic act of compassion (think of it as Yang energy) at the climax of *Jedi* repairs the state of imbalance that was caused by excess greed (or Yin energy). In other words, Anakin finds the balance within himself (and metaphorically within each of us)—thus bringing balance to the Force and peace and harmony to the galaxy. Light and dark, perhaps only temporarily, are in perfect balance, in a powerful reconciliation of opposites (this is also expressed rather notably through the reconciliation of father and son).

"What these films deal with," says Lucas, "is the fact that we all have good and evil inside of us and that we can choose which way we want the balance to go." [16]

And with that being said, the stage is now set for the final part of the ring structure: the center.

Notes:

1. Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, Terry Lecture Series, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.
2. The presence of an inclusion leads me to believe that Lucas's use of ring composition was at least partly inspired by biblical Hebrew poetry, which is primarily characterized by parallelism—particularly chiasmus and inclusion, among others.
3. David Ulansey, "The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic 'Inclusio,'"*Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 123.
4. Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 40.
5. "Vergence" is an interesting word choice—it refers to the movement of both eyes in opposite directions to maintain visual perception of an object. And as research has shown, "There is a natural symbiosis between vergence and vestibular responses. Deficits in vergence can lead to vertigo, disequilibrium, and postural instability" (Kapoula et al., "Vergence"). In other words, a loss of balance.
6. J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of "Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith,"* (New York: Del Rey Books, 2005), 221.
7. Nadia Julien, *The Mammoth Book of Lost Symbols*, (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Book Publishers, 2012), ebook edition, 134.
8. Anne Lancashire, "*The Phantom Menace*: Repetition, Variation, Integration," *Film Criticism* 24, no. 3 (March 2000): 37.
9. Hugh Hart, "Flaws in a Good Heart,"*Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 2002, http://articles.latimes.com/2002/jan/20/entertainment/ca-hart20.
10. George Lucas, "Of Myth and Men," interview by Bill Moyers, *Time*, April 18, 1999: 90.
11. Rinzler, *Making of "Sith*," 62.
12. Lancashire, as so often, hits the bullseye when she suggests that the Gungans and the Naboo perhaps represent "conciliatory and aggressive impulses, the conscious and the subconscious, or the ego and the id, that make up the whole of every man and must be

recognized and brought into a proper balance. Only a new balancing of the Naboo and the Gungans finally brings peace to the attacked planet."(Lancashire, "*Menace*," 34)

13. Mary S. Henderson, "*Star Wars": The Magic of Myth*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), 120.
14. Helaine Selin, *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures*. 2d ed., (Berlin [u.a.]: Springer, 2008), 1170.
15. Wikipedia contributors, "Yin and Yang," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin_and_yang.
16. George Lucas, "The Mythology of *Star Wars*," interview by Bill Moyers, PBS, June 18, 1999.

Part VII. The Center of the Ring

As previously noted, the primary meaning of a ring composition occurs at its mid-turn or "central place." According to Douglas, a ring "condenses the whole burden of its message into the mid-turn" [1] and the central place is usually "the site of an impressive climax that focuses on the major crisis in the narrative." [2]

The mid-turn also needs to make correspondences with the prologue and with the ending so the "whole piece is densely interconnected." [3] The center, then, integrates the whole and helps guide the interpretation of the work. "What has been seen through straight linear reading has to be read again with a fresh eye for the message that is in the mid-turn." [4]

Revenge of the Sith is clearly the centerpiece of the six-part *Star Wars* saga, in that it constitutes several major turning points: Anakin turns to the dark side and becomes Darth Vader; the Republic turns into the Galactic Empire; and Padme gives birth to twins Luke and Leia (both of whom take their turn in the spotlight in the following trilogy).

In addition, the end of *Sith* is the point where the ring turns and reverses itself back towards the beginning. It would appear, then, that Anakin and Obi-Wan's fateful duel on the volcano planet Mustafar and Anakin's later confinement to the famous black life-support suit amount to the center of the ring. That is, after all, the heart of the story, the central life-or-death crisis of the entire saga.

And this part of the ring does holds significant meaning. It is the Ordeal stage or Belly of the Whale of the Hero's Journey. It is the mystical Dark Night of the Soul. It is Jung's Night Sea Journey into the unconscious. Or, put simply, this is the moment in which Anakin, having plunged into the depths of Darkness, touches bottom (at the ring's lowest point) and undergoes a richly symbolic death.

Padme's dying words to Obi-Wan ("There's good in him [Anakin]**.** I know. I know there is … still …") also help connect the middle of the ring to both the beginning and the end. Her words not only harken back to the innocent little boy in *Episode 1* who "knows nothing of greed," but also anticipate Luke's identical plea to Obi-Wan in *Jedi* ("There's still good in him") as well as Vader's ultimate transformation and rebirth (the ascent back into Light, at the ring's highest point).

Now, we could certainly stop here and say that *Star Wars* conforms to all seven of Douglas's ring requirements, but I would argue that there's one scene in particular that represents the real center of the ring and that it definitely needs to be discussed.

Naturally enough, the scene occurs in the final minutes of the film.

The Unification of Opposites

Aboard a blockade runner in a conference room, Yoda, Obi-Wan, and Bail Organa discuss the fate of the newborn twins. After it's decided that Leia will be adopted by Organa and Luke will be sent to his family on Tatooine, Bail exits the room. Yoda turns to Obi-Wan:

> **YODA:** Master Kenobi, wait a moment. In your solitude on Tatooine, training I have for you.
> **OBI-WAN:** Training?
> **YODA:** An old friend has learned the path to immortality. One who has returned from the netherworld of the Force. Your old Master …
> **OBI-WAN:** Qui-Gon?
> **YODA:** How to commune with him. I will teach you. [5]

Although the scene is short, and mainly exposition, it does tie some narrative loose ends together in a fairly satisfying way. In addition, the mention of Qui-Gon Jinn clearly connects the scene to the beginning of the ring. And, as Lucas notes, "there's a hint of how Obi-Wan had learned to give up his physical being and become one with the Force [in *A New Hope*]." [6] So, the scene also connects to the end of the ring by helping to explain how Anakin becomes one with the Force and appears as a "Force ghost" at the conclusion of *Jedi* (presumably, he learns the path to immortality from Obi-Wan, Yoda, and/or Qui-Gon).

But above all, though, the scene reveals that *Star Wars* carries with it the classical mythological motif of immortality.

As you might already know, the quest for eternal life (and conquering humanity's greatest fear—death) has fascinated mankind since our earliest moments. It pervades mythology, religion, and

literature, appearing in stories from all cultures and time periods, as far back as the Epic of Gilgamesh, some 4,000 years ago.

It should come as no surprise that immortality also plays a vital role in Daoism. To ancient Daoist sages, the highest goal was "to transcend even death through the transmutation of one's physicality into the immortal spirit" [7] and thus, merge with the infinite and eternal Dao (more on the Dao in a bit). It was believed that immortality could be achieved through various methods, such as physical exercises and magical elixirs or pills. And one of the methods was a meditation and exercise discipline known as "Qigong" (pronounced "chee gung").

Qi is frequently translated as "life force" or the energy that flows through all things in the universe. It's said to be created by the dynamic tension between Yin and Yang. *Gong* means "accomplishment" or "skill" that is cultivated through practice. So, together, Qigong means "cultivating life force energy." And in case you hadn't noticed, the name Qui-Gon looks awfully similar to Qigong and, as many others have pointed out elsewhere, is mostly likely a deliberate reference to it.

Today, Qigong refers to the set of practices that involve consciously moving Qi through the body to improve the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of life. It's still used to achieve immortality, albeit in a more spiritual sense.

For instance, Spiritual Qigong, one of the different kinds of the discipline, is concerned with entering the "Qigong state," a focused awareness of existing in the present moment (bringing to mind Qui-Gon's advice to Obi-Wan to "Keep your concentration here and now, where it belongs"). Through this psychological state of deep mindfulness the practitioner is said to become one with the Dao and attain a kind of enlightenment.

Now, at this point, with references to both the Yin Yang and Qigong, it would be easy to think that Daoism was the main religious inspiration behind Lucas's modern myth. But the reality is that the films were heavily influenced by a multitude of religions, from both East and West, and have been interpreted from a wide variety of perspectives, including Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, New Age, and many others.

Rather, *Star Wars* has always aimed for something more universal than any one particular belief system. Lucas explains:

> I see *Star Wars* as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them down into a more modern and easily accessible construct that people can grab onto—to accept the fact that there is a greater mystery out there … There's a mixture of all kinds of mythology and religious beliefs that have been amalgamated into [*Star Wars*] and I have tried to take the ideas that seem to cut across the most cultures because I am fascinated by that. And I think that is one of the things I really got from Joe Campbell. What he was trying to do was find the common threads through the various mythologies, through the various religions. [8]

And this is where things get really interesting. Because as Campbell might say, in *Star Wars*, as in many myths, immortality symbolizes an archetypal idea, one of the "common threads" that Lucas is referring to. It's an ancient idea that actually runs through the mystical traditions of many of the world's religions.

And it's called the *unification of opposites.*

This needs a little bit of background so just bear with me for a moment. This will all make sense shortly (hopefully).

Generally speaking, the concept of the unification of opposites goes like this: we live in a world that is polarized into pairs of opposites. Right and wrong. Male and female. Self and other. Consciousness and unconsciousness. Life and death. Yet, a unity exists between the two contrasts, a fundamental unity that underlies all life. Duality, therefore, is merely an illusion. The opposites are simply manifestations of a basic oneness, two sides of the same reality.

Donna Brown of *The Esoteric Quarterly*, an online journal of philosophy, helps explain:

> The ultimate nature of Reality is non-dual. However, life, as the average person perceives it, regardless of his or her religious affiliation or lack thereof, consists of fragmentation, dissonance and the absence of unity and cohesion. This is due, in part, to the fact that dualistic thinking is one of the primary processes engaging the mind. Dualistic thinking has its roots in the interaction and pull between Spirit and matter. From the interplay of these two fundamental polarities, all the many lesser dualities emerge. The opposites … lead to desire for one thing to the exclusion of the other and consequently to suffering and pain; to a life filled with turmoil, imbalance and conflict. [9]

So, the path to peace, wholeness, and enlightenment (i.e., immortality), then, involves the realization of this dichotomy and going beyond it (usually involving some kind of "Third Way"), to where you awaken to a more expanded state of consciousness and see everything as part of a greater whole or "ultimate reality." [10]

Brown writes that:

> We have to disidentify with our fixed mental conceptions of good and bad, right and wrong, pleasure and pain etc., so that we can engage in an inner *alchemy of the opposites.* This implies allowing ourselves to consciously embrace the dance of opposites so that we intuitively grasp a non-dual truth or paradox. Flexibility, detachment, self control and the ability to hold a position of mutual inclusion and inner balance regardless of fluctuations are

> all involved. By adopting a dynamic and holistic attitude the contraries begin to balance, interpenetrate and fuse into each other. [11]

Unsurprisingly, there is perhaps no other symbol that expresses the idea of unifying opposites better than the Yin Yang.

So, let's look at the symbol again from this perspective.

The outer circle of the symbol represents Dao, [12] which is often translated as "the Way" or "the Path." Dao is the Supreme Ultimate, the ineffable mystery of the cosmos, the source of all existence and that which unifies all.

Yin and Yang are said to have arisen out of the Dao in a transition from oneness into the field of opposites (duality). The two primal forces of Yin and Yang "wrap around each other in perfect balance, conveying the feeling of the opposites belonging together as one unified whole contained within the circle of eternity." [13] Philosopher Alan Watts once put it this way: "The Yin-Yang principle is not, therefore, what we would ordinarily call a dualism but rather an explicit duality expressing an implicit unity." [14]

It's also important to note that Jung had a great respect for the concept of Dao. He used it "to describe both the process and the goal of his psychology": [15] the synthesis of unconscious and conscious elements or "becoming whole" (which includes bringing all the aspects of your shadow into the light). Jung wrote:

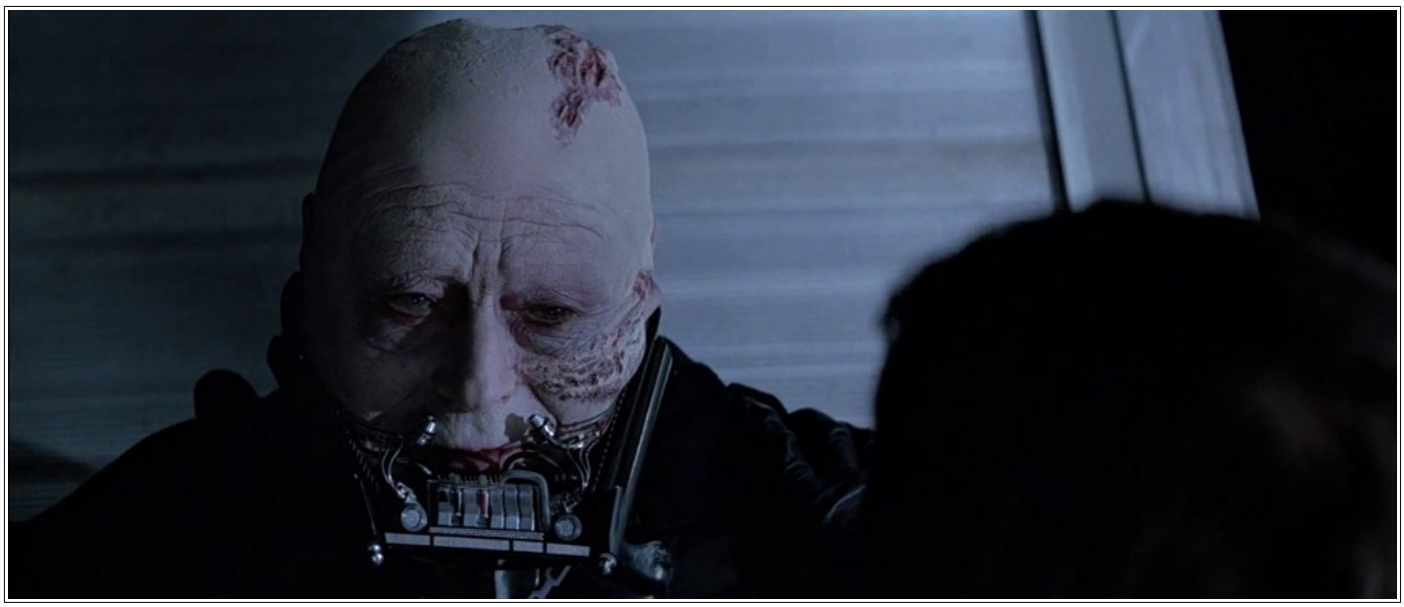
> Unfortunately our Western mind, lacking all culture in this respect, has never yet devised a concept, nor even a name, for the union of opposites through the middle path, that most fundamental item of inward experience, which could respectably be set against the Chinese concept of Dao. It is at once the most individual fact and the most universal, the most legitimate fulfillment of the meaning of the individual's life. [16]

The Dao, or outer circle of the Yin Yang, then, signifies the "Third Way." It is the "Middle Path" that lies between Yin and Yang, the path through which one unifies or *transcends* the conflict between opposites—where "the polarity between self and other begins to dissolve and where we are enfolded back into the Mind of the Dao, that primordial and ever-present Unity out of which the play of Yin and Yang originally emerges." [17] This is where consciousness is transformed, where the true self is realized, and where immortality is ultimately achieved.

And bringing everything back full circle, one of the methods used to help practitioners of Daoism find and cultivate this Middle Path is the spiritual discipline of Qigong.

Okay, so now that we know a little more about the idea of unifying opposites, let's revisit the end of *Return of the Jedi* one last time.

Darth Vader, moved by Luke's faith and compassion, turns on the Emperor, and sacrifices himself to save his son. Through this heroic act he finds the balance within himself, resolving the conflict between the light and dark sides of the Force. And by restoring inner harmony, he also restores outer harmony to the galaxy. Thus, Anakin fulfills his destiny and brings balance to the Force. Symbolically speaking, Anakin has balanced all of the pairs of opposites.



Now, for Jung, when the tension between opposites can be held, a third possibility—a "transcendent function" or "reconciling third"—would emerge that is different from the two opposites, a completely unanticipated outcome that would unite the two and transcend them.

And this, *Star Wars* fans, is where the Cosmic Force comes in.

You'll recall from earlier in this essay that the Cosmic Force exists *beyond* the Living Force (which itself comprises both the light and dark sides). The Cosmic Force is all-pervading and all-encompassing, meaning it's in all things and all things are part of it. Put another way, it's like the Dao. It serves as a unifying construct. (This most likely explains why outside of the six films, particularly in *The Clone Wars* television series, the concept of the Cosmic Force is explicitly referred to as the "Unifying Force.") And like the Dao, the Cosmic Force symbolizes the primordial unity that underlies all existence. It resolves all duality.

So, just as the Chinese philosophy of Daoism provides a third way or middle path between the opposites in its notion of Dao, *Star Wars* provides a similar middle path between the light and dark sides of the Force in its notion of the Cosmic Force. (In fact, the Cosmic Force is also exemplified in the ring composition itself in much the same way as the Dao is exemplified in the outer circle of the Yin Yang.)

Likewise, just as Qigong is a technique used to become one with the Dao and achieve immortality, Qui-Gon discovers the technique used to merge with the Cosmic Force at will and retain consciousness, that is, attain eternal life.

Given this backdrop, when Anakin restores balance to the Force he is in a sense reaching a kind of dynamic equilibrium between the light and dark sides and the interplay of each within the other. As a result, a third, completely unanticipated possibility arises: **use Qui-Gon's technique to become one with the greater Cosmic Force and go beyond the never-ending conflict between the two forces.** [18]

In other words, Anakin treads the middle path between opposites—even life and death—by embracing both simultaneously, in a paradoxical union that transcends them. Anakin's redeemed

spirit, then, materializes to Luke alongside the spirits of Obi-Wan and Yoda during *Jedi*'s end celebration. The symbolism is clear: Anakin has reached a profound state of enlightenment.

From a mythological point of view, this represents a kind of "apotheosis" or divination of the hero. The old boundaries of Anakin's self have been transcended and he's "become a god with the divine ability to soar above the normal limits of death and see the broader view of the connectedness of all things." [19]

Joseph Campbell once put it this way:

> You go past fear and desire, past the pairs of opposites … into transcendence. This is an essential experience of any mystical realization. You die to your flesh and are born into your spirit. You identify yourself with the consciousness and life of which your body is but the vehicle. You die to the vehicle and become identified in your consciousness with that of which the vehicle is the carrier. [20]

In a truly heroic transformation of consciousness, Anakin has undergone a union with the ultimate mystery of existence and experienced eternity. He is "now fully part of the cosmos, dead to the old, limited vision of things and reborn into a new consciousness of connections." [21]

In Jungian terms, Anakin has become whole—a mature, fully developed human being whose "conscious and unconscious have learned to live at peace and complement one another." [22] He's come to a greater understanding and awareness of himself and the world around him (and his place in it). Thus, his True Self has emerged. (For Jung, the movement towards individual wholeness was also the remedy for the mass-mindedness discussed in *Clones*. "The salvation of the world," wrote Jung, "consists in the salvation of the individual soul." [23])

To the Daoist, Anakin has become "open to the totality of being" and "finally returned to the state of complete stillness in which they are one with the Dao." [24] This is the moment when "the 'individual self' of the practitioner and the 'world' in which he moves are now in effortless, joyful union—and both are known as Dao. The dancer has become the Dance." [25]

Finally, the center of the ring—in its emphasis on immortality and the unification of opposites and through its connections to the beginning and end that "integrate the whole"—allows us to revise Lancashire's earlier analysis and take it one step further.

Not only can *Star Wars* be read as "a metaphor for the never-ending conflict between the evil and the good within us all," but it can now, at least in part, also be read as a metaphor for *transcending* inner duality to a state of divine knowledge and compassion by finding the "underlying unity inherent in all the pairs of opposites within us." [26]

Inside each and every one of us lies the path to immortality.

One last thought. In 2005, religious historian Karen Armstrong delivered the Ingersoll Lecture at Harvard Divinity School. It's an annual lecture series on the subject of immortality. The following excerpt, which strongly echoes the views of Joseph Campbell, seems particularly fitting right now:

> Like religion, myth addresses what is timeless in the human condition. It is also a program of action that tells us how to access the timeless or the eternal. And this, it seems to me, is how we should understand the notion of immortality, which has nothing to do with time. Immortality is not an endless succession of moments; it is not everlasting. It is not confined to a posthumous existence in the future. It is an eternal *now* … Religion is about transformation; by ritual and ethical practice we become fundamentally different. Religion is not about preparing for the beatific vision in Heaven; it is also about living a fully human life in this world. By becoming one with these paradigmatic figures, losing our flawed, everyday selves in their perfection, we too can become perfect and inhabit an eternal dimension even in this world of pain and death. Like any other religious truth, immortality must become a present reality. It is liberation from the constraints of time and space, and from the limitations of our narrow horizons. It involves a profound realization that the deepest core of our being is inseparable from what has been called God, *nirvana*, *brahman*, or the Dao. Immortality is not a matter of waiting for the next life, but in perfecting our humanity here and now. [27]

George Lucas sold his Lucasfilm company, along with all the rights to Star Wars, *to Disney in 2012—shortly after retiring from the business of making blockbusters to instead return to his roots and make "experimental films." He has never spoken publicly about ring composition.*

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Notes:

1. Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*, Terry Lecture Series, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 58.
2. Ibid., 66.
3. Ibid., 37.
4. Ibid., 58.
5. Lucas, *Sith*.

6. George Lucas, “Audio Commentary,” Disc 1, *Revenge of the Sith*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 2005).
7. Mantak Chia, *The Inner Smile: Increasing Chi through the Cultivation of Joy*, (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2008), 15.
8. George Lucas, “The Mythology of *Star Wars*,” interview by Bill Moyers, PBS, June 18, 1999.
9. Donna M. Brown, “Duality and Non-Duality: Awakening to Unified Perspective,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* 6, no.1 (Spring 2010): 61, http://www.esotericquarterly.com/issues/EQ06/EQ0601/EQ060110-Whole.pdf.
10. Akhil Chandra, “The Golden Mean and the Pairs of Opposites.” *The Times of India*, May 5, 2004, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/THE-SPEAKING-TREEBRThe-Golden-Mean-and-Pairs-of-Opposites/articleshow/658970.cms?
11. Brown, “Duality,” 69.
12. It’s my understanding that the Dao can also be thought of as *Wuji* or “ultimate nothingness” which is often represented by an empty circle.
13. Leslie Temple-Thurston and Brad Laughlin, *The Marriage of Spirit: Enlightened Living in Today’s World*, (Santa Fe, NM: CoreLight Pub.: Distributed by Blessingway Books, 2000), eBook edition, 63.
14. Alan, Watts and Al Chung-liang Huang, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 26.
15. Stephen Karcher, “Jung, the Tao and the Classic of Change.” *I Ching: Living Change* (blog), http://www.ichinglivingchange.org/resource-library/01papers-room/jung-the-tao-and-the-classic-of-change.pdf.
16. C.G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, 2d ed., translated by R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 205. Jung also wrote that “Individuation, or becoming whole, is neither a summum bonum [the highest good] nor a summum desideratum [chief desired], but the painful experience of the union of opposites (Jung, *Archetypes*, 382).
17. Brown, “Duality,” 69.
18. It came as a surprise to me to learn that Anakin’s physical body is said to have *disappeared* upon death. According to Wookieepedia, the *Star Wars* wiki, “It is explicitly stated in *Champions of the Force* and the Databank on the official site that the organic part of Anakin’s body disappeared, and that Luke just burned his suit and mechanical parts for ritualistic purposes” (Wookieepedia contributors, “Force Ghost”).
19. Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3rd ed, (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2007), 171.
20. Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 134.
21. Vogler, *Writer’s Journey*, 171.
22. C.G. Jung and Marie-Luise von Franz, *Man and His Symbols*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), introduction, xi.
23. C.G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self: With Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams*, translated and revised by R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), eBook edition, 71.
24. Stephen Sawyer, “The Tao as a Path,” *The Hanover Historical Review*, Spring 1996, http://history.hanover.edu/hhr/hhr4-3.html.

25. Elizabeth Reninger, “Keeping The One, The Taoist Practice Of The Return To Embracing The One,” *About.com*, http://taoism.about.com/od/becomingataoist/a/Keeping-The-One.htm.
26. Temple-Thurston and Laughlin, *Marriage of Spirit*, 62.
27. Karen Armstrong, “Is Immortality Important? Religion is about inhabiting the eternal in the here and now,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Winter 2006, http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news-events/harvard-divinity-bulletin/articles/is-immortality-important.

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